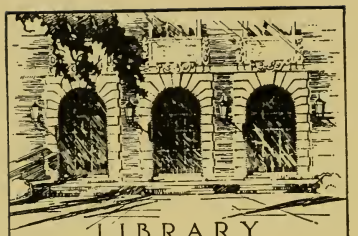

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WE COSTELIONS.

A Novel.

BY

J. SALE LLOYD,

AUTHOR OF

"THE SILENT SHADOW," "RUTH EVERINGHAM," "THE HAZELHURST MYSTERY," "RAGAMUFFINS," ETC., ETC.,

AND EDITOR OF "SHADOWS OF THE PAST."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1882.

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LONDON:
STEVENS & RICHARDSON, PRINTERS, 5, GREAT QUEEN STREET,
LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS, W.C.

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WE COSTELIONS.

CHAPTER XV.

I DON'T know how Adam and Eve felt when they were turned out of Paradise, but I think our sensations must have been somewhat similar as we looked our last upon our poor little home, not that there was much resemblance between Willowlands and Paradise, nor was leaving it like leaving Kingsholme Abbey; but when we came to Little Newington we had some hope as to the future. We had the rent of our Devonshire home to depend upon, and a roof of our own over our heads, and when

we went to Willowlands my father had furnished for himself, and we had got rid of the gaudy cretonnes which had been such an eye-sore to us. Now we had nothing left, and sweet and kind as dear Aunt Phyllis was, I must confess that dependence on her for daily bread was somewhat painful to me, and I am sure it must have been still more so to Sir Charteris.

A carriage met us at Heathley Station. It was one of the useful sort which could be either open or shut, and upon the present occasion it was closed. It was evident, however, that it was no hired vehicle, for it was bright and well kept, while the cushions were spotless and softly stuffed. A powerful, well-made, handsome horse was in the shafts, and a coachman in quiet livery was sitting statue-like on the box, while a footman stood by the door, and as we were getting Florence and our

two old ladies into the carriage, a small phaeton drawn by a pony came up behind us, and I uttered a cry of gladness, for it was Aunt Phyllis, and she was driving our dear little pet Shamrock, who had been taken away amid many tears the day before, and I had then little thought to see him again so soon.

Good, kind, thoughtful Aunt Phyllis! She could not have given me a more pleasant welcome.

"I have come to take Miriam home with me, Sir Charteris," she cried, cheerfully, "I knew you would have no room for her; jump in, Miriam, we shall be there as soon as they are. Shamrock likes our good level roads," and in another moment we were rolling briskly along with the carriage behind us.

"Welcome, my own dear niece, to the home which was your mother's, and which

will always be yours," cried Aunt Phyllis, folding me lovingly in her arms, while a clean-looking lad led Shamrock away to the stable.

"You see, Miriam, I did not bring 'Ears' with the pony. I would have done so had I *believed* in him, but I did not. He was too specious, he talked too much, and did too little; poor Shamrock has not improved in appearance under his hands, even since I have known him."

"I am glad of that, auntie," I said with a smile, "I have never believed in him either. He talked himself into papa's good graces, and into the place, and I am not sorry to leave him behind. He praised himself more than he groomed Shamrock; but you must let me tell you how grateful I am to you for buying my pet."

"I ought rather to thank you, that

through you, I have met with so good a pony," she replied, kindly.

"That is *your* way of putting it, auntie; but I will answer for it, that you would never have thought of keeping a pony for yourself."

"My dear, I am so good a walker, I have not needed one hitherto; but you see I am growing older every day, and it will be a great comfort and happiness to me."

"You, dear auntie!" I cried. "You are the most unselfish woman on earth."

"Here they come!" interrupted she, joyfully. "Now, Miriam, to give them a hearty welcome."

Here Mrs. Armatage joined us, and amid kindly words our home party (exclusive of my two brothers, who had remained at Mr. Radcliffe's to study with him) entered Greenholm.

For Sir Charteris a sitting-room had

been prepared, and the first thing I saw when the door was opened—taking up the greater part of one side of the apartment—was the colossal-sized oil-painting of our Flo's mother, the beautiful blue eyes looking down on us just as I had seen them at Kingsholme Abbey.

My father started as he saw it.

"This *is* kind of you, Phyllis," he said, with feeling. "It has been a trouble to me that the picture should go to strangers."

"I thought you would accept so small a gift from me, dear Sir Charteris, to inaugurate your arrival."

"You thought right, Phyllis, and I thank you from my heart," he replied, warmly.

"I hope you will feel at home here," continued my aunt, "for no one will enter this room but yourself, unless you invite them. And now, Miriam, we will leave your father to shake down; when he is

ready to see his bedroom, he will find us in the drawing-room," and to avoid his thanks she hastened away.

Sir Charteris never knew that good Aunt Phyllis had given up her own study to him. I found it out, but I was forbidden, on pain of my aunt's eternal displeasure, to reveal the fact.

The delight of the Ladies Costelion and Trevelyan at meeting Grandmamma Armatage again was great, and the good old lady had prepared so many plans for their amusement that there seemed no probability of their feeling dull. She had a bazaar coming off, and they were pressed into the service as workers, which, being a novelty, proved a source of much interest to them.

Florence and I shared a large, airy apartment, across which there was a curtain, which could be drawn, if desired.

Both ends of the room were furnished alike with white varnished wood; two "duchesse" dressing-tables, with their little drawers and oval looking glasses, two iron beds with snowy draperies, two chests of drawers, two wardrobes, two marble-topped washhand stands, two small tables covered with crimson cloth, upon each of which stood two twisted wooden candlesticks, an inkstand, a vase of fresh flowers, and a few books of my kind aunt's choosing. Over mine hung a beautiful picture, and in one moment I knew that it was my own dear mother's.

Yes! she was like Aunt Phyllis, and she was like me too, but to my mind, ten times more beautiful than either of us. Never had eyes looked so lovingly—never had lips smiled so sweetly. It had been taken in those happy days when she had first given my father all her love, and be-

fore marriage and disillusion had come to her.

"Oh! mother, mother," I cried, unmindful of the presence of my aunt and sister, and, indeed, forgetting them as I stood before the picture with raised eyes and clasped hands.

"Good gracious," exclaimed Florence, "is that really a likeness of your sister, Aunt Phyllis, or is it one you have had done of Miriam?"

"It is Miriam's mother, dear Florence, and here is a picture of your's over your table. I had it copied from your father's oil-painting, and I hope you like it."

"Oh! dear Aunt Phyllis, how can I ever thank you? it will be a great happiness to me, believe me," I said, earnestly.

"It is very like the original," acknowledged my sister; "but as I cannot remember my mother, neither may be *really*

like her; however, it is none the less kind of you to have had it done for me, and I am much obliged to you."

But, although she kissed my aunt as she spoke, I could hear no real gladness in her voice.

Heathley had once been a heathery down; but now it had all been built over, and it boasted its station, its church, its town-hall, and its market place, and held its own amongst other little towns.

The part where Aunt Phyllis lived was the Belgravia of the neighbourhood.

Above the town rose a hill of green meadows and wooded parkland, while its top was crowned by quite a little forest of blue pines and tender green larches.

Thrown up against the dark foliage was the tall, white steeple of the stone church and the well-proportioned edifice itself, surrounded by God's acre, in which the

monuments stood out plainly, and where lay my mother's father. There was a path through the fields which led to the church, and here and there among the trees peeped a gabled house.

Greenholm had once stood alone like those others, and doubtless in years to come the green sward will all be divided into gardens, and there will be residences right up to the church; but, so far, they had only extended to my mother's old home.

It was a handsome old house—I had almost said mansion—but that there was so little pretence about it, or about anything in the well-ordered establishment. It was built of large slabs of stone which had once been white, but were now grey with time. A fine pyracanthus was trained over the front of the house, while the Irish ivy crept in profusion about its sides, rising

to the very roof and twining about the chimneys.

You ascended to the hall door by four massive stone steps under a noble portico with tall Corinthian pillars on either hand —for the rest all was plain—not a particle of ornamentation appearing anywhere.

But Greenholm stood alone so far as size and style went, and the houses which had crept up to its garden walls were altogether of a different class. Modern houses of not very large rentals—houses inhabited by retired officers, gentlemen of small independent means, stock brokers, smaller bankers, Government clerks, and city merchants—houses all ranging from one to two hundred a-year, each detached, and standing in its own pretty well-kept garden—a happy, prosperous looking little colony of English homes.

"Most of our neighbours are busy men,

Sir Charteris, but we have a few living among us who are enjoying their '*otium cum dignitate.*' I shall especially recommend to your notice an old Indian colonel who has, ever since I have known him, been expecting to be made a general, and to get the command of a brigade! but I think his friends in office must have forgotten him, for he is getting an old man now. You will certainly find him amusing till you have gone the round of his anecdotes: after that you may consider him a bore. I don't myself, for he enjoys his own stories so vastly that I am always pleased to hear them again to make him happy, though I know them all so well that I could tell them for him."

"And his name?"

"Is Colonel Markham."

"I do not think I have ever met him in society."

"No, I don't suppose you have. He has no English friends, except at Heathley. All his life has been spent in India, and his complexion bespeaks the fact."

"Well, anyone in the shape of a gentleman will be acceptable to me, Phyllis," said my father, sadly; "I miss my old friends, I must confess."

"If there is anyone you would like to ask here, Sir Charteris," said my aunt, with some hesitation, "pray invite them—think of the house as your own. I should have suggested this before, but that I know your old acquaintances would not be used to our quiet ways."

"No, no, Phyllis, you have enough trouble with us as it is; but I hope not always to be a burthen on you. I have not been myself of late, but I am not beyond work if only I can find it. As to my friends, I miss them, it is true; but I dare

say if I sought their society now I should meet with 'the cold shoulder.' There is nothing which scares a man of fashion more than the fear of being seen with a shabby-coated friend. It is the way of the world. I was like that myself once, but now I am thankful for the shabby coat to keep out the cold."

Now, Sir Charteris's coat was not shabby at all, but it pleased him to call it so, and Aunt Phyllis and I did not contradict him, so he continued—"As to your quiet ways, I might have thought them so once, for county families are apt to surround themselves with unnecessary state, but now I find them very comfortable, I assure you."

"I am glad, indeed," cried my aunt, a bright look settling down on her dear face, "and I hope the change here will do Florence good. Do you not think she is looking very wan and ill?"

"Yes, indeed; I believe the breaking off of her engagement preys upon her mind."

"Oh no, papa, indeed, I do not think so," I began—but was stopped short.

"Of course you do not, Miriam, as you must be fully aware that you are much to be blamed in that matter; you should have informed me at once of what was going on." Aunt Phyllis raised her head suddenly, as though she would have answered him, and I knew she was going to take my part, but she slipped her hand within mine instead, in silent sympathy, and I returned its pressure, and then she said—

"We will do our best to make your darling happy, Sir Charteris; Mr. Lyndhurst likens her to a flower which will not bloom except in the light and the sunshine. And now, we must care for her as an exotic, and shield her from all the trouble we can; I trust, ere long, you will see the

roses blossom again on her fair cheeks—they are white enough now."

"They are, indeed," he sighed; then his eyes fell on me. "I only wish I could see her well and strong like Miriam."

"Miriam is a heather blossom, not an exotic," she returned with a smile. And I smiled too, for I knew that of all flowers she loved the heather best.

But Sir Charteris looked at her in wonder.

"Upon what do you form your simile, Phyllis?" he asked. "I am not sure it is a compliment to Miriam. The heather is a common, humble, scentless, little flower; but makes a good cover for the grouse, so it is useful."

"The heather is fresh and healthy," she replied, "meekly bears the rain and the storm; it scarcely complains when it is trampled under foot, but it has the courage

to raise its head again. Wet or dry, hot or cold, the heather is always the same. Surely you must admire it, Sir Charteris."

"You must be of Scotch extraction, Phyllis; as for myself, I have never given the matter any thought; but I will give Miriam the credit of bearing our troubles well."

"They are worse for you, papa," I returned, gladdened by his word of praise.

"That goes without saying, my dear—still they are bad for us all."

"Miriam," asked Grandmamma Costelion, solemnly, as she entered the room with an open magazine in her hand, "is this piece of poetry yours? It is marked with your initials"

"Yes, grandmamma. Do you like it?"

"It is upon faith in absence. I admire your ideas upon the sacredness of a plighted love. Your language is, in some parts,

powerful, but your rhetoric might be improved. Before I took to writing, I made myself a master of grammar, which made me write with plainness and propriety, and upon that foundation I worked at rhetoric. No one should attempt authorship until they have obtained elegance, purity, and clearness of language."

"But every one thinks their own geese swans; do you suppose any author could be made to consider his or her composition bad? But I am only an embryo author at present, a tyro in the art of writing, and therefore, I shall be glad to learn how this power of language is to be obtained."

"Quite right, Miriam, never be above learning. You will do very well in time, no doubt my dear, but to obtain perspicuity, a full knowledge should be first acquired of the subject in hand, and you should meditate upon it deeply. Then,

there are many things to be avoided—ambiguous words, baldness, dry brevity, too many metaphors, and a confused length of periods. Never repeat words, but find a synonyme thereto. In writing, language often does not seem to supply us with sufficient words, but one must make the best of them; the mind has great capabilities, and can turn sentences, and even words to suit its purpose and explain its meaning."

"My dear mother, you are talking platitudes; no one would think of writing until they knew as much as that, you may be be sure," exclaimed my father impatiently.

Lady Costelion looked at him coldly.

"It is time I went out of the world, Charteris, when my opinion is considered valueless," and she turned and left the room.

"Grandmamma," I said, going after her

and placing my hand upon her arm. "Indeed I consider your advice good and sensible, and I shall try and remember all you have told me."

"My dear Miriam," she returned impressively, "it always comes to this; the young people grow wise in their own conceits, and *think* the old people fools; but, my dear, the old people *know* the young people to be so—Charteris is a fool! I would not acknowledge it to anyone but you, because he is a Costelion, and my son; but he has been a fool all his life—a fool when he married beneath him—a fool when he was ashamed of a good wife—a fool when he neglected her—a fool, when she died, to marry again. He had money and two children, and should have been content. A fool when he went travelling and left his home—a double dotted fool when he saddled himself with poor Lady Lavinia and

her mother; and the biggest fool of all when he gave his name to that company. I have no patience with him!"

"I am sure papa did not mean to be unkind to you, grandmamma," I said, trying to soothe her; but her dignity was fairly ruffled, and while we were yet talking, a bell was heard to ring violently, so much so that I was alarmed, and ran out into the passage, where I met one of the maids going quickly upstairs. "It is Lady Trevelyan's bell," she replied to my questioning look, and I followed her.

Upon the stairs I met my sister.

"Quick, Miriam, quick," she cried, "Lady Trevelyan has taken some wrong medicine, she ought never to have been allowed to keep her medicine chest."

We hurried into the room, and there found the poor old woman groaning with pain.

"Do not leave her, Flo," I whispered, and ran down stairs for Aunt Phyllis.

"Auntie," I said, as quietly as I could, "will you come up to Lady Trevelyan—she is very ill, and I think you had better send for the doctor. Oh! how I wish Mr. Lyndhurst were at hand, I have great faith in him."

"Oh! my dear," cried the poor old woman as we entered the room; "it is dreadful. I am in tortures. Oh! Miriam, where is Aunt Phyllis—she will help me."

"I am here, dear Lady Trevelyan," said my aunt, softly. "What has happened? Pray tell me."

"Well, my dear, I had pulled down my blind to have a nap, but I couldn't rest, and I thought I would take a sleeping draught, which I aways keep made up—I had a bad night last night—so I fancied a sleep now would do me good; but, it was

dark, and by mistake, I have taken something else, and it will kill me."

Aunt Phyllis whispered to the servant, who left the room quickly.

"Have you sent for the doctor?" I asked, and she nodded in the affirmative.

Then we undressed her and got her to bed, and drew aside the curtains to let in the light of day. How livid the poor old face looked. She suffered too much even to complain in words, but lay moaning pitifully, like a dumb animal in pain. The doctor came, but he was too late to save her. She must have taken the poison some time, he said; he smelt the bottle and pronounced it to be aconite.

It was evident that she had either been too much frightend, or in too great pain to ring the bell, and my sister in passing the door heard her groan, and entering the room, found her in semi-darkness, and was

greeted by the assurance, which proved to be only too true, that she was dying, and in terror, rang that peal which had so startled me.

So poor Lady Trevelyan passed away, and I went down to communicate the fact to my father. He had not offered to go and see her, nor had she asked for him, but had died with her poor withered old hand in that of Aunt Phyllis.

"Papa," I said, softly entering his study, "it is all over—she is dead!"

"Well, Miriam," he said, putting down his book, and raising his face to mine, "we must all come to it, some sooner, some later. She was an old woman; it is better as it is, there will be one less to keep; and what had she to live for? Why surely you have not been crying! She was no relation of yours whatever."

"She was Lady Lavinia's mother," I said,

"and she died in great agony; it is not strange, surely, that I should feel it."

"I am very sorry that she has suffered," returned Sir Charteris, taking up his book again, "but it is over now."

"Yes, it is over," I echoed, and then crept quietly away, feeling hushed and awed by death's dark shadow, and pained and sad at my father's lack of feeling. Yet, I suppose, since he never really cared for the daughter, who was his wife, he could hardly be expected to mourn for her mother. Aunt Phyllis sent for Bob and Trevelyan to attend the funeral, also Mr. Radcliffe and Mr. Lyndhurst, and the solemn sable procession wound up through the green fields, while Lady Costelion, my sister and I watched from an upper window. Poor Lady Trevelyan had been a nervous, fidgetty old woman, and we had often thought her a bother, but now that she

had passed from among us, we missed her. So it always is, I suppose; even our greatest blessings seem small while we have them, and the small ones appear large when they are withdrawn. Truly human nature is a perverse thing.

CHAPTER XVI.

Colonel Markham proved an amusing neighbour. He took to Sir Charteris, rendering him a reverence which was somewhat comical in its demonstrativeness; while Sir Charteris—well, I don't feel quite sure that he really liked the Colonel; but being two idle men, of similar ages, they collided. And Aunt Phyllis encouraged the intimacy between them, that my father's mind might be drawn from his troubles, and it certainly struck me that the Colonel, who was a bachelor, found another attraction at Greenholm besides Sir Charteris,

although my aunt, as I could see, was totally innocent of his admiration for her; busy people being seldom on the look-out for that sort of thing.

Aunt Phyllis had made a little sanctum of a dressing room upstairs, and had kindly given me the use of it, so that I did not often come in contact with Colonel Markham, except when he was invited to luncheon or dinner. Upon these occasions his anecdotes were often very amusing. They generally treated of Indian life in some shape or form, and were certainly most ingenious concoctions. I say concoctions, because we quickly perceived that he was a wonderful adept at drawing the long bow; indeed we have heard since that he was notorious for his stories in the sunny East, and that untruths in the stations where he was well known were called "Markhams." One or two of his traveller's tales occur to me as I

write, and I may as well set them down here. The Colonel was very fond of parrots. He had several at Heathley, in his pretty little detached verandahed home, which he had named "The Bungalow," and all these parrots talked.

Upon one occasion my father was praising their powers of speech, when their owner said, excitedly :—

"Yes! sir, yes! they are good birds, every one of them; but I once had a parrot who was indeed clever. I taught that bird to speak, Sir Charteris, in a most marvellous manner. There was nothing that Polly could not say. Knowing that native servants are at times apt to torment their masters' pets, I instructed that bird to call me by name, whenever it needed anything, or was in any trouble. Upon one occasion, unseen, I was watching one of my niggers bullying the parrot by poking at it

through the cage with a piece of stick, and poor Polly screamed terrifically, then called out, quite distinctly, 'Markham, dear Markham, come quick, come quick!' I need hardly say that I went as fast as my legs could carry me. I had just come in from riding, and my whip was in my hand, and I thrashed that nigger within an inch of his life. He was servile under his punishment, and expressed the deepest contrition; but almost immediately afterwards I lost my bird. I offered a hundred rupees reward for it, but the poor thing was never brought back. I inquired everywhere, and used my best endeavours to find it; but my efforts were of no avail, and I gave up the bird as lost. *Six years after*, I was shooting in a jungle three hundred miles from the station where I had been formerly quartered, and being in want of food, I at last made up my mind, though very much

against my inclination, to shoot some parrots to make a pie. I was getting short of ammunition as well as food. So, not to throw away a shot, I waited until near sundown to get at the birds roosting. Well, Sir Charteris, I spotted fully five hundred parrots up a mango tree. The leaves were barely visible, so closely were the birds packed, sitting side by side. I crept up, and was about to take a deliberate aim, where they had congregated the thickest, so as to bring down as many as I could with that one shot; when, all of a sudden, I heard from the very centre of the group a well known cry, 'Markham, dear Markham, come quick, come quick!' I dropped my gun, held out my arms, and called joyfully, 'Polly! my pretty Polly, come to me.' And down flew my long-lost bird and nestled on my bosom. You may

smile, Sir Charteris; but I assure you that story is the solemn truth!"

"Ah! then it was, indeed, a wonderful bird;" said my father, with a twinkle of unbelief in his eyes.

I remember this story of Colonel Markham's, chiefly because he told it on the day in which our family had once more assembled together in its entirety. And there are others which are also landmarks in my memory, indicating those periods in our lives when trouble has touched us more keenly.

It was Christmas eve, that night on which we met again, and Aunt Phyllis had asked one or two other friends to join us. The day following was not only Christmas day, but Bob's birthday; and notwithstanding our position in the world, we were a happy party. My brother had come of age, and life was about to change for him.

The papers were now to be signed which would make dear old Kingsholme Abbey a possession of the Costelions no longer; then he was to go to Sandhurst.

Yes! the twenty-sixth of December had come! Sir Charteris and Bob were closeted with the lawyers for a long time, and we all knew what was happening within those four walls. After a while, there were footsteps sounding over the polished oak floor of the hall. The door shut, and the lawyers were gone. The papers and conveyance were signed, and Kingsholme was ours no more.

It seemed to us that there was silence in that little study then; but my father and my brother were quietly talking over the present and the future. Well nigh an hour passed. It appeared an age to Aunt Phyllis and to me. It was like waiting for the return of the mourners from a funeral.

The dull expectancy, the dead past, the buried hopes.

But Bob came at last, and stood before us. He did not look like the Bob of even the day before, but had the resolute air of one who had of his own will passed through some great ordeal.

"It is all over now, Miriam," he said, quietly; his eyes wandering over the snow-clad hill side towards the church upon the rising ground.

"Yes, dear," I returned, "the old life is left behind."

"But there is a new one before you, my dear nephew and niece. You were born to the former one, but the latter you can shape for yourselves. There is a clean page open now, be careful to fill it well. Whatever you take in hand, do it with all your heart, and never forget to ask your Heavenly Father's blessing upon it."

"I was just thinking," remarked my brother, dreamily, "that the future is like that hill before us. It will be all collar work to get to the top of it. There is no road visible, the snow has hidden it; but he who means to rest in God's garden up there, must keep a straight path, for there are ditches and pitfalls under that white surface which looks so smooth; but I trust we shall all find our way there at last."

I got up and kissed him, and we stood close together, his arm about my neck. I had no words to reply to him, for his had touched me and held me silent.

Suddenly Aunt Phyllis uttered an ejaculation, and, looking up, we saw Mr. Radcliffe entering the gate. He was unexpected, and we both expressed our surprise, while Bob ran out to meet him.

After sitting a few moments, during

which time he looked thoroughly uncomfortable, he said,

"Miss Miriam, I shall be grateful if you will let me have a few words with you;" and Aunt Phyllis who overheard the request, found she wanted Bob to help her sort some papers, and we were left alone.

"I dare say you can guess why I have come," he began at length, raising his patient eyes to mine.

"For the pleasure of our society, I suppose, or to give us that of yours," I returned, smiling, as well as my sad heart would allow.

"No, Miss Miriam, I have come to-day with a specific purpose which I want to set before you. You will answer the few questions I have to ask, will you not? and you will advise me."

"I will, if I can," I replied, doubtfully,

not knowing to what he required me to pledge myself.

"Yes, I knew it; you have always been good and kind." Then, with a sudden effort, "How is your sister? Is she happy? Has she got over her—her—the breach of her engagement?"

"You must not ask me too many questions at once," I said with a smile, "lest I should not follow you, but I think I can remember those three. I do not think poor Flo is happy; she does not flourish in adversity, and she is far from strong or well. I wish we could see her better. As to her feelings towards Sir Gordon Graham, I cannot inform you, as she seldom names him, and when she does, it is only casually, as she might any other acquaintance of former days."

"Then you do not think she still loves him?" he asked, eagerly.

"I cannot possibly say."

"Miss Miriam," he continued, excitedly, "I love her still; I shall always love her. Is there any hope for me? Do you think she could be happy as my wife? I am a poor man, but I could give her a comfortable home, even though it must needs be a humble one. I should not have dared to speak, had I not once believed she liked me, and had not trouble fallen upon her, and upon you all. I know she is beautiful, and that alone might attract some more eligible person to her side; but none can love her better than I do, Miss Miriam, and I have come to know whether she will accept me."

"You can but ask her," I replied, my heart full of pity for the disappointment which I felt sure would be his. "I will go and ask her to come down."

"Florence," I said, entering her bed-

room, where I found her sitting before the looking-glass, staring at her own reflection.

"Miriam, how you startled me," she cried, petulantly. "Why cannot you open the door more quietly? I was just thinking that I am greatly changed; but now tell me, do you not think I am just as good-looking, in a different style?—what I have lost in brightness, I have gained in pathos. Look in the mirror, Miriam—that is a pathetic face, is it not?"

"Flo," I returned, "you are a vain young puss! But I came to tell you we have an old friend downstairs, who wants to see you."

"An old friend?" she questioned; "I did not know we had one in the world, and after Cowper I exclaim, 'Yea, marry will I, and with all my heart!' but first I must know who this old friend is."

"Mr. Radcliffe."

"Oh!"

The prolonged enunciation of the word indicated no pleasure; then she turned a funny, fretful face towards me—

"Can't you get me off?"

"Why, Florence? You seemed to like his company some time since."

"I dare say, I did, but that is not now. I was younger then, and perhaps more foolish; at any rate, I am not in a playful mood to-day, and I don't feel that he would amuse me, so I won't come down."

"My dear girl!" I exclaimed, "how can you be so ungrateful! Just remember what obligations we are under to Mr. Radcliffe. He has taught our brothers for years, and since our misfortunes he has had them both at his home; and he has done it all out of pure friendship."

"It has been very good of him," replied she, indifferently, "but it is very unpleasant to be obliged to do the grateful. . You can manage that department so much better than I can, that I would rather leave it to you."

"I am sure Aunt Phyllis will think it very rude if you do not come down when Mr. Radcliffe has asked for you," I said, decidedly.

The shot told. My sister thought more of Aunt Phyllis's opinion than of that of anyone else, and without another word she took her brush and smoothed her golden hair, then pronounced herself "ready."

After the first greetings were over, Florence asked suddenly, "Where is Aunt Phyllis? You told me she was here."

"No, I did not; you misunderstood

me," I returned, "but I will go and find her."

Mr. Radcliffe gave me a grateful look, which was not lost upon my sister.

"You will do nothing of the sort, Miriam; I will go myself," she said imperiously, laying a detaining hand upon my arm.

"Miss Florence," began the poor man, nervously, "kindly let Miss Miriam go; I want to speak to you, and you will not refuse to hear me."

"You *can* have nothing to say to me which Miriam may not hear," she returned, coldly. "I am all attention, Mr. Radcliffe."

"But, Florence dear," I exclaimed, "it would be very unpleasant to me to remain if Mr. Radcliffe has anything of a private nature to speak to you about."

"If you go, I accompany you," she replied, decisively.

Was ever man placed in such a position as to have to propose before a third person! Was ever girl in a more awkward situation to have to be the mystic element in such a scene! But never had I liked or admired our late vicar so well as I did at that moment. The nervousness vanished from his manner, replaced by the courage of despair. He knew that the woman who could so expose him to ridicule as to make him propose to her in public, could have no love for him. Infatuated as he was, he could see so much, and he knew his chance was *nil*, but there was a doggedness and determination in his nature which made him still resolve to do that which had brought him to Heatherley.

"Pray remain, Miss Costelion," he said, with quiet, calm enunciation; "you have ever been a friend to me, and my feelings are no secret to you."

Then he turned to my sister.

"I came here to-day to ask you to be my wife. I had some hope when I entered this house; but I may as well tell the truth, I have none now. Nay, do not reply to me yet, Miss Florence—hear me out. I am aware that you are above me in station, and in nature's gifts; you are beautiful, while I am plain, therefore had sorrow not befallen you, I should have remained silent; but ever since I knew of your uncertain future, I have asked myself whether I could not comfort you—whether you would be induced to share my home, humble though it may be, and I had come to believe you might find some happiness in the quiet path of duty which must be trodden by a pastor's wife. I ask you still—God knows that I love you, that you have been my one dream in months and years of toil and

dull reality—but I ask you now without hope."

There was a long pause, then my sister spoke.

"Mr. Radcliffe, you have been a good friend to my brothers, and we have all appreciated your kindness. I am aware that, in girlish folly, I became your companion, when it would have been wiser for me to have kept away from you; but please to remember that I was scarcely more than a child, and you were to me a middle-aged man. I felt it to be wrong afterwards, and I asked your forgiveness the night Lady Lavinia died. That should have ended the matter."

"It would have done so had not trouble overtaken you," he answered, proudly; "but that only has brought me to your side."

"It was a mistake to come," she said, quickly. "We Costelions cannot forget

our pride in our poverty, and resent pity as we resent insult. I think we may consider the subject closed, Mr. Radcliffe."

"Quite closed," he returned, firmly. "Still I love you, Florence Costelion; and if ever the day should come when you need a friend, you will find one in Edward Radcliffe."

He took her hand and kissed it quietly, and she did not resist him; rather she seemed cowed by his great love. Then he clasped mine, and silently departed.

"You have broken a noble heart, Florence," I exclaimed, indignantly. "And to make him propose before me!"

"It was the very best thing I could have done for him," she returned, with a half laugh. "He would not have known whether he was upon his head or his heels had you gone away; as it was, he was eloquent. It was like the 'finally, dear

brethren!' All the difficulties were past, and he had only to make a finish. He ought to be very grateful to me; and as to a broken heart, he is too good a man to give way to that sort of thing. He will accept this disappointment (if he really ever could have dreamed such a union possible) as he accepts everything else—from the Lord! And now, Miriam, I have a bone to pick with you: you knew what was coming, and yet you asked me down. I wonder you had not more consideration for Mr. Radcliffe's feelings. Had it not been for all he has done for the boys, I should not have treated him as civilly as I did. It is an insult to a Costelion to be proposed to by a nobody!"

"Perhaps it would be well for all the Costelions to remember that *they* are now 'nobodies!'" I retorted, indignantly, and

retreated from the room to talk the matter over with Aunt Phyllis.

I found her in her own little snuggery, and Bob by her side helping her with her accounts.

"Bob," I said, "I want to speak with Aunt Phyllis alone for a little while."

He looked in my face for a moment and a smile swept over his own.

"What! has our late vicar been trying to cut out poor Herbert Armstrong?" he asked. "I always fancied he had a *penchant* for Florence."

"You should not give way to fancies, Bob," I replied, laughing in spite of myself, but you need not be afraid of *anyone* cutting out Herbert Armstrong, for there is not another man like him in the world."

"Not even me?" asked Bob, with a grimace. "Well, you are complimentary, Miriam; but I'll forgive you, more espe-

cially as some day you will find out your mistake, for Master Herbert will turn up with a 'yellow gal' one of these fine days, and half a dozen little brown kids, and you will find your hero has forgotten all about you, and has allied himself to a Hindoo or a Parsee, or something else as incompatible, years ago."

I threw auntie's sofa-cushion at his head, but he dived and missed it, and turned a saucy look upon us from the door.

"It is wonderful how that boy bears up against his troubles; they would have soured the lives of most young men. But now, Miriam, what have you done with Mr. Radcliffe?"

"He has gone, auntie," I said, quietly; "Florence has refused him."

"Poor fellow," she returned, "I guessed that would be the end of it—well! he has his work, and he will take comfort in

rendering others happy. Miriam, Mr. Radcliffe is a good man; I have no fears for him."

"Nor I, auntie; and I do not think our Florence would have been satisfied with such a life as he could offer her; but she might have dismissed him gently, and with a kind word."

"She might, indeed—more especially as he has been so helpful to her brothers; but under the circumstances we cannot make use of him again. Miriam, dear, Trevelyan must go to school here. Heatherley College is a good one. I know the master, and feel certain he pushes on his boys well."

"But, auntie, is this expense to fall on you as well as all the rest of it?"

"It won't break our bank," she returned, cheerfully, "my mother and I have enough and to spare, and should all come to all, we

could narrow our expenditure if we were to try; but, at present, it is not needful."

"Auntie, dear," I said, looking lovingly into the sweet face, "God has raised us up a good friend in you; what should we do without you?"

"He has set us in families, Miriam, dear, and it is my duty, as well as my privilege, to stand by you now that you are in adversity and sorrow."

I was about to ask whether Sir Charteris had stood by *her* in the days of his *prosperity*, but I stayed myself in time, for the remark would have vexed Aunt Phyllis.

"You know the old saying that blood is thicker than water," she continued, smiling.

"Yes, auntie, and sometimes it is *so thick that it freezes*," I answered, somewhat bitterly. She raised her face to reply, but there was a sound of hurrying footsteps up the stairs, and we both paused to listen.

In another minute Bob was in the room, looking white and terrified; he laid his hand upon Aunt Phyllis's arm. "Come!" was all he said, and she obeyed him swiftly. What could it all mean? what was the matter? I felt bewildered, too bewildered to move for some moments, then with a dazed, dull feeling I mechanically followed them down the stairs, and when I reached the hall I heard sounds in the room which had been given to my father for a study. My brother turned his pale face to mine pitifully, as I opened the door. "Parting from the old place has killed him, Miriam," he said, in an awe-struck voice; and I saw Sir Charteris upon the floor; his features were fearfully distorted, and I uttered a low cry of anguish. Aunt Phyllis was kneeling on the ground beside him, and her hand was upon his heart.

"No, no, Bob, he is not dead; send for

the doctor immediately; and, Miriam, ring for the servants; a mustard plaster upon the back of the neck must be applied at once."

The doctor lived near, and, for a wonder, was at home; but the poultice had been applied before he arrived, and he desired it should be kept on, and also ordered others upon the calves of the legs, and the soles of the feet. I shall never forget the days that followed—days of gravest anxiety for my father's life. All his faults were forgotten; his coldness towards me was as though it had never been, and my love for him was intensified by his sufferings. The doctor told us that his nervous system must have sustained some great shock after a prostrating strain, and the brain had given way. He was of opinion that Sir Charteris's mental sufferings must have been very great, ere he would have suc-

cumbed so suddenly. There was very little hope of his life, but we watched over him day by day, and hour by hour; the one prayer of our hearts being, "Lord save him! Lord spare our dear one to us." Our dear one! yes! we all knew how dear he was now, with the fear of losing him before us. How thankful I felt in those sad hours of watching that I had implicitly obeyed my father's wishes, according to my aunt's advice. It must be a terrible thing for a son or daughter to see a parent die, and to know that they have disregarded his words and wishes, and that now that dear one has no power even to forgive; not one word to soothe the aching heart—not one. My father had never spoken since he was first attacked; he was unconscious, and his left side was completely paralysed. Poor Sir Charteris! my dear, proud father, lay there senseless

and helpless, and no one could relieve his sufferings, not even Aunt Phyllis, not even the doctor. Lady Costelion would not leave her son, but sat beside his bed, still and stern, as silent as he, but I saw that her eyes were wet with tears; the first I had ever seen her shed.

CHAPTER XVII.

TIME, however, brought a favourable change in my poor father's condition. It was to be life for him, not death; and we thanked God, going about with a great weight lifted from our hearts. We were not to lose our dear one, but were to be permitted to keep him yet awhile longer. But it soon became evident that the grim scythe-bearer had given him the first of his warnings, although we trusted the other two were yet a great way off; for Sir Charteris had lost the use of his left arm.

It almost appeared too, as if a veil had

been drawn over his memory, for he never by any chance now mentioned our dear old Devonshire home, and we were afraid to name it to him, knowing well what the loss of it had cost him.

I sat with my father at that time more than I had ever done before; he seemed to like to have me by his side, although he would often bid me to be silent, and remain so himself; at others he would ask me to read to him; sometimes he listened, at others he would freely confess that he had not been attending to me; but he once added, and I never forgot it, that my voice lulled him, for it was soft; that made me very glad indeed.

I had finished my book, of which Aunt Phyllis had approved, although she had suggested many alterations, which, of course, I had made.

My joy was very great when it was

accepted, and I knew that it was really in the printer's hands, pledges thereof, in the shape of proofs, arriving almost daily for my correction.

Then followed the choice of the binding. I have published many books since, and the covers are of small importance to me now, but that first one I did think a good deal about. A whole night I lay awake, balancing the advantages and disadvantages of maroon, cuir, violet, blue, and green, and after all settled on neither, having espied at the publisher's office a rich binding of coral colour, embossed with black ivy leaves, which took my fancy.

All with reference to my book was a secret between Aunt Phyllis and myself; for Sir Charteris had a birthday coming, and I much wished that it should be a surprise as my gift to him upon the occasion.

The day at length arrived, and with a full heart I carried my offering to the study. I suppose most people are proud of their first set of books. I know I gazed fondly at the three volumes as they lay so neatly side by side with the gold letters showing up my name so well. "Miriam Costelion!" how pretty it looked in print!

"Why, what is that?" said Trevelyan, coming up unheard, so deeply was I engrossed by my admiration, and stretching out his hand to make a grab at the books.

"Oh! don't, Tre, don't dirty them; they are for papa's birthday present." And then I added, "Now are they not lovely?"

"How can I tell, if you won't let me look at them," he growled.

"Look at them; of course you may; but don't touch them, there's a good boy."

"Well! I'm blessed!" he cried, "do you mean that you wrote them. Why, then I'll try my hand too."

"You!" I returned scornfully, and I laughed.

"Now, look here, Miriam, don't laugh at me," said Trevelyan, crossly, "I daresay I have quite as many brains as you have; and I know a sight more Greek and Latin than you do, I'll warrant. You think you're a great swell because you've written a book, but you have only had the pleasantest part of it at present. The critics will *take the curl out of your tail*, I can promise you!" With which polite speech he made a grimace and bolted, perhaps fearing retaliation in some form.

"Papa," I said, as I entered the room, book in hand, "I have brought you a present."

"That is a pity, Miriam, for you can have

no money to spare; but what is it? books?"

"Yes, papa, do you like the binding?"

"Rather too bright for my taste; but why, Miriam, you surely don't expect me to read this; it is a *novel*, and I have not read one for over twenty years; they are not in my line."

"Still, I hope you will like this one, papa," I replied, between laughing and crying, for I was excited and somewhat disappointed. "Please look at it. I am sure you will read this one, for it is mine."

"Yours," he echoed; "Miriam, what do you mean?" Then he put on his spectacles and examined the books minutely. "Why did you not tell me what you were about?" he asked, at length.

"I wanted to surprise you, papa."

"Well! it cannot be helped now, but it was scarcely wise of you to publish in your

own name until you had found out how your works are received by the public."

"I shall not write anything I am ashamed of, papa," I answered, resentfully, "and I am so disappointed. I thought you would be pleased, and I am so anxious to make money."

"Few do so by light literature, Miriam; where one succeeds, a thousand fail."

"But I suppose all may earn something, if it be ever such a little" (my tail beginning to get out of curl already, as Trevelyan had expressed it). Then I raised my eyes to my father's. "I thought you would have been pleased," I faltered, and a pause followed. After awhile he drew me towards him.

"There, child, do not fret, we must have no tears on my birthday. I will read your book, and no doubt I shall like it; but you see you took me by surprise a little."

But the kind words had come too late. I was thoroughly disappointed, and went with my trouble to Aunt Phyllis.

She was sitting before her writing table: an open letter was in front of her, her head was resting upon her hand, and her face was hidden from me; but I felt that something had happened to agitate her.

She started when she saw me. "I did not hear you come in, dear," she said, softly, and I noticed that she was much excited.

I went to her side, and, kneeling down, placed my arm about her. "Dear auntie," I asked, "what has happened? what is the matter?"

"Miriam, do you remember my telling you that I had faith that all would come right one day between Ralph and me. Well! dear, I have now hope as well as faith. His father has sent for me—he is

ill, and wants me to be with him, and, Miriam, that acknowledgment from him is a great deal."

"Oh! Aunt Phyllis, I am so glad," I cried, "so glad that you are to be rewarded at length for all your goodness; so glad that, after all these years of patient waiting, you are to be happy at last. Auntie, dear, I could dance for joy."

"You have a fellow feeling for me, dear, have you not?" she said, with her sweet smile, from which the sadness seemed to have died out.

"And you will go at once?" I asked.

"No, not to-day, for several reasons: first, it is your father's birthday, and I should like to dine with him; secondly, I think it will be better to reply by letter, a telegram might alarm Ralph's father, you know."

"How kind, how thoughtful you are,

dear Aunt Phyllis," I cried, giving her a hearty kiss. "In your place I should have thought of nothing and nobody, but should have just run away to secure my happiness."

"Would you, indeed?" returned my aunt, laughing. "And now, child, what does Sir Charteris say to your book?"

I had gone there intending to tell Aunt Phyllis all about my disappointment, but now I determined not to let any sorrow of mine dim the new-born brightness of her life, and I parried her question.

"Papa will read my book, auntie, and hopes to like it. I must await his verdict patiently."

"Patience is a virtue, dear Miriam, and do you know, I think it is generally rewarded."

"And I am sure it ought to be, auntie," I added, decidedly.

"What ought to be, *will* be, Miriam, you may rest assured of that; and now tell me what Miss Caroline said to you—I know you heard from her this morning."

"She tells me that her eldest sister is peacefully sinking. Such a death must be very beautiful, I think—no pain, no suffering, but just a gentle translation from this life to one better. I expect her next letter will inform me that the Montagues, who once were seven, now number only two."

"It is sweet to think that the seven will one day be re-united," said Aunt Phyllis, dreamily. "Miriam, I often reflect that if our paths are dark here, if our hoped-for joys are unrealised, we have something better than earthly happiness to look forward to. Will you try and remember this, dear Miriam, if you are denied the life you would choose for yourself?"

And I promised that I would.

Sir Charteris liked my book, and I heard no more about my not publishing under my own name.

Aunt Phyllis started off to nurse her lover's father with a light heart, and Mrs. Armatage affectionately bade her God speed; but days passed into weeks and she did not return. She wrote to us that she and the old man were completely reconciled, if it can be called a quarrel where the ill-feeling has been all on one side.

In one of her letters she told me that her old friend had written for his son to come home, his great wish now being to see her united to him. So dear Aunt Phyllis was really to be happy after all.

I had had a presentiment of evil ever since she had left Greenholm, but what were my sickly fancies when placed against plain facts? All was to end happily, and I was very glad for her sake.

During her absence one day when I entered my father's study, I found him absorbed in a letter, and without really looking at it, the knowledge came to me that it was from Herbert Armstrong, and my heart gave a great glad cry; but I was silent.

"Miriam, is that you?" said Sir Charteris, dreamily. "Ah! yes, well, sit down, child, sit down, this is from Captain Armstrong. Like everyone else he has heard that I am a beggar, and he has written to offer to take you off my hands, and thinks I shall be glad to let you go under my altered circumstances."

"He never meant that, papa," I said, resentfully. "How can you say such things? Herbert is the soul of honour; no unworthy thought could possibly enter his mind. Oh! father, whatever your answer may be, do him justice. As for my-

self, I think it noble of him to come forward when we are in trouble. Thank God, he loves me for myself, and for myself alone."

"You speak strongly, Miriam."

"Not more strongly than I feel, believe me, papa; remember I have loved him ever since he saved my life, seven years ago."

"You are open with regard to your feelings," said my father, satirically. "Most maidens speak with more reserve, whatever they may feel."

"Papa, what will you say to him? what answer will you give?" I asked, with painful eagerness.

"The only one that is open to me," he replied, coldly. "I would accept no civility, acknowledge no fellowship with these people when I was in the zenith of my prosperity. I refused this young man's hand for you when I had a roof of my own

under which to shelter you; and now that I am a beggar I cannot change. No, Miriam, if you have one grain of the family pride, you will see that it is impossible. You are a good girl, and had I seen my way to make you happy without sacrificing my dignity I would have done so, but as it is, it is out of the question."

"Father, I love him," I pleaded, pitifully; "my whole happiness is bound up in him—indeed, indeed it is."

A long pause ensued; then my father rose and kissed me. "I am very sorry, Miriam, but it cannot be helped."

That was all. They were few words, but they were enough to dash the cup of happiness from my lips, and to leave all dark and dreary, and I knew that again my future had been sacrificed to my father's pride.

What right had he to be proud now? My whole heart cried out against it. Why

was my life and that of my lover to be darkened and blighted thus? surely, surely it was unjust. I fought the battle out in my father's study (sitting upon the low chair which Aunt Phyllis's kind hands had placed there for me) with my face hidden. I did not wish him to see the struggle which was going on in my mind. I was of age, why should I not assert my independence? why should I not express my determination to marry the man I loved? Oh! I was sorely, sorely tempted, but a vision of Aunt Phyllis's dear, patient face came to me, and I resolved to be patient too. I verily believe she was my good angel. Dear Aunt Phyllis!

After the struggle was past I arose, pale and trembling, but triumphant.

"Very well, papa, I bow to your decision," that was all I could say, and I think my obedience touched him, for he

took both my hands in his and answered me more earnestly than was his wont.

"Miriam, you are a brave girl; who knows but what things may come right some day—indeed, I would try to like the young fellow for your sake, if it were possible, but it is not."

I strove to smile, but neither words nor smiles would come, and I crept away to my own room—that is, the room I shared with my sister. It was empty, and I flung myself upon my knees by my bedside to pray wordlessly for strength. It was utterly impossible for me to form sentences or to put my thoughts and troubles into words, but still I felt comforted and refreshed, and knew that my God was near me in my tribulation. Then I arose and had a good cry: most women know what a beneficial effect that has upon one, and so it had upon me. Pre-

sently my sister came in and looked at me keenly.

"Miriam," she said, "you have been crying; what is the matter? Is there any fresh trouble?"

"No, none that will touch anyone but myself."

"Miriam, I insist on knowing what is wrong. If you do not tell me I will write to Aunt Phyllis."

"I do not wish to keep it from you, Flo," I answered, sadly; "all the world may know it for what I care. Captain Armstrong has heard of our misfortunes, and has written to offer to me again—at least, to papa."

"Oh! I am so glad, Miriam," said my sister warmly, "Herbert Armstrong is a good fellow, one of the right sort."

"Yes, dear, he is all that," I replied quietly, "but papa will refuse him again."

"Impossible!" cried my sister indignantly. "Miriam, you should have spoken up yourself, you should have told him you loved the man. You should"—

"Stop, dear, do not excite yourself; I *did* tell him, but he was obdurate, I shall never now be Herbert's wife;" and the tears which were near the surface overflowed, and ran races down my white cheeks.

"This is injustice," cried my sister passionately, "and I hate that sort of thing. I will go and have it out with papa myself; it is scandalous to treat you so," and she sprang impetuously towards the door.

"Flo! you will only make matters worse," I pleaded, "you will only vex papa; please, please, don't go." But with her usual wilfulness, she was gone, and I could not stop her.

In about a quarter of an hour she came

slowly up the stairs. I had not looked for any good, had not hoped for any, but I raised my face questioningly to hers, as she entered the room. She was flushed, and her eyes had an angry light in them. She threw her arms about my neck; "It is shameful, and so I have told him!" she cried hotly.

"Oh! Florence, dear, you did it in kindness to me, I know, but I hope you remembered how ill he has been. I trust you did not worry him," I began. But she stopped me.

"There, Miriam, you are just like a married woman; if anyone tries to protect them from their husband's ill-usage, they turn round and declare they like it. I have no patience with such sentimental nonsense; you *don't* like it, so why pretend to do so."

"I do not pretend any such thing, indeed,

dear, and my father's decision has made me very miserable; but I cannot act against his wishes. How could I expect to be happy if I did?"

"Many girls have married to please themselves, and seem contented enough."

"Seem, yes; but you cannot look beneath the surface, you cannot read their hearts. I know Aunt Phyllis would say I was right. How I wish she were here!"

We remained in our room together talking until afternoon tea was announced. In auntie's absence either Florence or I always made it, so we hurried down to perform our usual duties, when to our surprise we found a stranger with Mrs. Armatage in the drawing-room, who was introduced to us as Mr. Chilton. We had not heard the name before, but her affectionate manner towards him soon showed us that they were old friends. They did

not, however, talk of the days that were gone, as one might have expected, but just joined in the general topics of conversation going on around, and if they had had anything of a more confidential nature to speak of, they had got it over before we came down. We found that our new acquaintance was not quite a bird of passage, but was going to stay at Greenholm, at any rate for some days, and he and Mrs. Armatage evidently had a secret between them which was of a pleasant nature, for they looked at one another and smiled every now and then,

Mr. Chilton was a splendid looking man, tall and powerfully built, with such an air of strength about him that he might have been painted for a Samson, only he certainly had not long hair; on the contrary, it was of a rich warm brown, not too straight, but closely cropped around the well formed,

somewhat massive head. The eyes were dark slate colour, with lashes black and curved.

His complexion was bronzed and healthy looking, his nose straight and well cut, while the lower part of the face was entirely hidden by a long moustache, whiskers and beard, of various tints, shading from the colour of his hair to an almost golden hue.

When he smiled, a set of strong white teeth gleamed out pleasantly, and you got a glimpse of a well shaped mouth; his air was polished, though not strictly conventional. From the first it was difficult to treat him as a stranger; his eyes would rest upon you with such a kindly interest, and he imbued you with a feeling of confidence before you had spoken half a dozen words to him.

Florence made the tea that afternoon,

and I saw him watch her white hands wandering among the pretty china cups.

Flo's hands were certainly one of her great beauties; rather long, with privet-hued tapering fingers, and pink shell-like, almond shaped nails; such aristocratic hands, very unlike my small brown paws, which I must have inherited from my mother, for no thorough Costelion would have owned them. Mr. Chilton seemed struck with my sister's beauty, and I did not wonder at it, for she was, as she had herself said, quite as pretty now, in her frail delicate loveliness, as she had been when her fresh bright colouring had been so much admired, nor was I greatly surprised to see how interested she was in him, for he was a man to command interest whether you willed it or no.

The dinner hour seemed to come more quickly than usual that afternoon, for

we had been listening to Mr. Chilton's adventures by flood and field; not that he had ever been a soldier, but he had been a traveller in many lands, and had abundance of strange tales to tell of what he had seen and heard, though he spoke little of what he had done, for which I liked him. Scarcely could Othello's stories have been more enchaining; and I could not help comparing our pale golden-haired beauty to that ill-fated fair Desdemona, as she sat with her blue eyes resting upon the dark bronzed face, so intensely listening to every word, with a faint flush hovering on the pale cheek ever and anon.

We dressed for dinner in our simple fashion, and I left my sister before the glass, to run downstairs to send off a post-card before the bell should ring.

As I entered the drawing-room, Mrs. Armatage and her friend were seated in

front of the fire talking, and I conclude they did not hear me enter, for they took no notice of my presence.

"And when do you expect Phyllis back?" he asked.

"That I cannot tell," she answered, "but I will let her know you are here."

"No, no, that would spoil my pleasure; I must surprise her, and see how she looks. I have often pictured the meeting, Mrs. Armatage, I wonder will it be like my ideal."

I coughed, to rivet their attention, and he turned round at once.

"Have you been listening to our secrets, Miss Costelion," he asked, with his genial smile.

"I do not know whether it was a secret," I answered, "but I certainly overheard you say you wanted to surprise Aunt Phyllis."

"And so I do, young lady. Now, I

wonder whether you have ever heard your aunt speak of me?" he questioned with a peculiar look.

"I do not remember ever to have heard your name mentioned."

Was it my fancy, or did his face fall.

"Well, perhaps you will humour my whim nevertheless, and if you should be writing to your aunt please do not say I am here."

"Of course I shall not refer to it," I said. "If grandmamma thinks she ought to know it, she can inform her without my interference."

"I see you are a very sensible girl," he replied, with a smile, "you and I are sure to be friends. Do you know, you are very like your aunt?"

"People say so, but I fear it is no compliment to Aunt Phyllis; she has such a sweet, dear face, I could never be really like her."

"Shall I tell you a secret?" he laughed, leaning towards me. "Now, I should not be one bit surprised if some day yours will be found to be a sweet, dear face too, by some one. We will ask your aunt her opinion when she comes home."

Then I went to the other end of the room to write the card, and I heard Mrs. Armatage say, "In your place, I should go to Glen Avon, but you know best."

"No, I will meet her here," he returned, decisively, "that was what he wrote to me. Had he been worse, I might have done so, and indeed should have done so, but she tells you he is better."

Florence here entered the room, dressed in a plain, black velveteen costume, which showed off the tall, slight form, with a white ruffle around her slender neck and wrists, which suited her style well, and the

handsome, grey eyes of our new made acquaintance followed her.

Sir Charteris had now to be introduced, and Lady Costelion, who informed me, in an audible voice, which was intended for a whisper, "that he was a very fine young man." Of course he was, there could be no two opinions on that point; but, I felt uncomfortable that he should have heard his personal appearance thus canvassed. She was growing a little deaf, and was not now clever in the modulation of her voice, and besides, it was not as low and soft as it probably had been in her youth. Has not some wise one remarked, that in old age the ancient men become old women, and the women old men?

Certain, it was, that Lady Costelion's voice had become somewhat masculine, and Mr. Chilton obviously heard her remark,

for he flashed a look of amusement at me across the room.

It was evident that Sir Charteris liked him, and the evening passed off pleasantly, aided by a little music.

My sister and I sang some Italian duets, which he seemed to like, for he stood beside the piano, and never spoke one word until we had finished.

I must say it is more agreeable to have an appreciative audience, even though it consists of only one or two persons, than to be *talked down,* which is a sensation vocalists have to experience sometimes. When my sister and I were in our room that night, of course we spoke of the addition to our circle, but I found her unusually reticent in giving any opinion upon Mr. Chilton, whereas, I was warm in my praises of him.

The next day broke dark and gloomy;

heavy rain fell in wind-driven showers, in which hail mingled, striking our window panes fiercely, while the trees waved their bare branches and the bushes bowed their heads before it. Not a gleam of sun shone out; it was as much as we could see to eat our breakfasts. Florence usually partook of hers in bed, but dull though the morning was, she was up and dressed ere the prayer bell rang.

That forenoon was a long one for her. She was restless and unsettled, apparently, for the book was laid aside unread, and from time to time she wandered to the window and looked out, uttering her disgust at the weather upon each occasion. Mr. Chilton was writing letters in the dining room, and I think she was wishing for his companionship. I did my best to amuse her, but unsuccessfully. After awhile, a firm step came through the hall, the door opened,

and Mr. Chilton entered the room. Florence was standing with her arm resting on the window, and her head upon her hand, her attitude bespeaking despondency, and she did not move at all when he came in. He watched her for a few seconds, then went to her side, and laying his hand upon her arm, said gently, "Miss Florence, is anything the matter?"

I raised my head as he spoke and looked at them, and my heart gave a great bound for I saw my sister lift her eyes to his face, and I could read their expression. I had never seen it in hers before, but I had in Herbert's, and I knew it meant love. A great wave of colour dyed her cheeks, and faded out, leaving her whiter than before; then the eyes fell, and the slender fingers were moving nervously among the leaves of a fern which stood there. She had only met this stranger yesterday, and already

she loved him! Then I turned my gaze upon him. Had he, too, noticed those outward signs of agitation? I think he had, for there was a strange look in his face which I had not seen there before, a look of wonder, and of tender pity; a look, which a strong man might give to a tiny, wounded bird, lying helplessly in his hand, trusting to him to do something to ease its sufferings. Yes! it was a loving compassionate look, which Mr. Chilton gave my sister. Then he spoke. "Have you nothing to amuse you this dull day? Come, I will challenge you for a game of chess."

"I only know the moves, and I daresay you are a good player."

"Well, I can give you some pieces, and that will make us equal. What do you say?"

"I shall like it, if you will teach me how to play properly; only, I make one bargain,

don't give me the game; I can't bear to be treated like a baby."

"I will do my best," he returned, with mock gravity, but with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

"And now, Miss Florence, where is the chess board kept?"

"Miriam knows, she will fetch it," answered my sister; and I rose to do so, but he laid his hand lightly on my arm and stayed me.

"I couldn't think of your going; tell me where it is."

"I don't know how to explain it to you, you would not be able to find it I expect."

"Try me," he laughed, "why I know every hole and corner in this dear old house."

He soon returned with it in triumph, and in a few minutes, the pieces were placed, and the game was in progress.

That was not the last game by many

played between these two. It seemed that Mr. Chilton devoted himself to the amusement of my sister.

I had kept my word; in writing to Aunt Phyllis, I had not mentioned our visitor's name, and my note had gone in one of Mrs. Armatage's letters to her daughter. She had also followed out her friend's wishes, but she had begged Aunt Phyllis to come back, if only for a day or two (this I heard afterwards), and she, fearing that something must be wrong at home, packed up a little box and came without loss of time, sending no announcement of her advent.

It was the fourth day of Mr. Chilton's stay at Greenholm. Afternoon tea was waiting, the gas was burning brightly overhead; the click of Grandmamma Armatage's knitting needles was distinctly audible. A little Queen Anne's kettle was hissing and spluttering upon the small table at

which I was presiding. I poured out the tea, and carried some to the two chess players, and had just returned to my chair, when something impelled me to look up, and I saw, though no one else did, that Aunt Phyllis had entered the room. Her eyes were rivetted upon Mr. Chilton; she signed to me to be silent, and walked quietly across the room, where she could see his face more plainly, and just then, a cry escaped her, it was only one word, but it told me all, "Ralph!"

She had found him out; the bearded man who had gone away as a youth, had been recognized by love's intuition.

In a moment he was upon his feet.

"Phyllis! have you come home?"

And so they met, after many years. He took her by both her hands (oh! how they trembled, but it was with joy), and looked lon ginto the sweet, pale face; and.

surely I did not imagine it, the light faded from his own. Still, he received her tenderly, lovingly, but had I not heard the one word, "Ralph," I should not have known by any sign from him, that he was the lover for whom my dear Aunt Phyllis had waited so long and patiently; and a sad sinking seized upon my heart as I saw the man's earnest grey eyes leave Aunt Phyllis's face, from which youth had passed, and settle for an instant, with a glance which was one almost of fear, upon that of the beautiful girl, which was even then turned up to his so eloquently.

Did Aunt Phyllis see that look as well as I? She parted from the clasp of his hand and said, simply.

"You should have let me know you were here, Ralph; I was not prepared for this meeting."

"He would not let me tell you," struck in Mrs. Armatage.

"No, I wanted to surprise you," he said, kindly;" but I did not mean that our meeting should be quite like this," and he glanced lightly around, and I knew that he had wished to meet her alone.

"I have spoilt quite a pretty tableau," said Aunt Phyllis, nervously. "When I entered the room I thought Ferdinand and Miranda were before me; and now, in greeting my old friend I have neglected all else."

Then she kissed us each, and called me to go upstairs with her.

"Miriam, Miriam, I told you that he was faithful, that he would come back; but, oh! dear child, I think that he was disappointed. I saw his face change. I had not thought of it before, I have not noticed it myself, looking at the gradual

alteration in my glass from day to day; but after all these years it must have come upon him with a shock. He had kept me in his heart young as when we parted, and now he finds me middle aged. It is sad for him, Miriam, for he is in his prime, the same dear face ennobled, the same manly figure perfected. Do you wonder that I love him, dear? I have been patient. Was he not worth waiting for?" and she smiled at me through her tears. But they were happy tears, even though there was a vein of disappointment in her mind that she was not still fresh and young to greet the lover who had been true to her for so many years.

"Miriam, dear," she continued, "I have a secret for you. Mr. Chilton has consented to our union. He has grown very fond of me, and cannot bear that I should be absent from his bedside, so I am going back

to him to-morrow; but, for the present, I shall not tell Ralph, nor shall I allow any announcement of our engagement."

I raised my face to hers, interrogatively, and saw that she was trembling.

"Auntie, dear auntie!" I said, with a sinking heart. "What is it?"

"I should not blame him, Miriam, if finding me different from what he had always pictured me, he——"

"I should then!" I answered, hotly. "He could not surely be so ungenerous."

"That he could never be," she replied, firmly; "but I will wait, I will make quite sure before it becomes irrevocable—now no one knows—there are none to point him out as having broken faith. Had we been together all these years the change in me would have come to him as it has done to those around me, so gradually as to be scarcely observed, and his love would not

have waned." Then she added, nervously, "I suppose he has been good friends with you, dear, and—Florence."

There was a strange pause before the utterance of my sister's name. Had she too seen that look in her eyes? and how had she read the answering one in his?

"Auntie," I said, impetuously; "Auntie, you should not doubt him. He has been faithful to you through long years, and has come back to make you his wife. Declare your engagement *at once*, and get married without loss of time, and Flo and I will be your bridesmaids."

"Why do you advise this, Miriam?" asked my aunt, quietly.

"Oh! Aunt Phyllis, I have no especial reason," I replied, reddening under her gaze, for I knew my words were not strictly true; "but surely you have both waited long enough. I hate unnecessary delays, and

Shakespeare evidently agreed with me. Do you remember his words in King John? 'Defer no time, delays have dangerous ends.' So, if he begs very hard, you will give him a nice, kind answer, will you not? and please tell me when I may congratulate him."

"I will think it all over, dear child; but mind, until I release you, I expect you to keep my confidence."

"You need not fear that, Aunt Phyllis."

"I am sure I need not, Miriam."

Then a tap came to the door, and I opened it. It was Mr. Ralph Chilton.

"Is your aunt here, Miss Miriam?" he asked. "Mrs. Armatage told me she had gone to her room;" and Aunt Phyllis herself came forward to answer him.

"You need not mind my little Miriam, Ralph. She is my very own niece, you know, my dear sister's child, and she is my

confidante; but she is a safe one, and will keep our secret."

"I have come to speak to you about that very thing, dear Phyllis," he said gently. "We have had enough of waiting. I do not think Miriam need be discreet any longer. You see, child, I have dropped the *Miss,* now you know that I am to be your uncle, and I think I may be allowed to give you each a kiss," which he did accordingly. "And now, Phyllis, let us go and have a quiet chat in your little snuggery. I have been in there when Miriam was in possession."

So I crept away, and left them together, hoping earnestly that they would arrange matters speedily; but I could not shake the weight off my heart which had settled there, for whichever way I looked there was trouble. Either Florence or Aunt Phyllis must suffer, that was very evident; but

surely it would be better that it should be the former. Her love was but a sapling, and could have but little root, while Aunt Phyllis's was a part of her very life. As for Mr. Chilton, I had a strange intuition that he would not be altogether happy either way.

That my sister had attracted his fancy was to me evident; but I could not believe that any one could supplant so rare a woman in his love. I then went to sit awhile with my father.

"Miriam," he said, "I have read your book, and like it; there is sound common sense displayed in its pages, and what is still more wonderful for a woman, you have spared us the millinery department. The plot is healthy, if not very profound, and it is handled prettily, even pathetically in some places. I did not think you could do so well."

Such praise from my father was almost too much for me.

"Papa, do you really mean all that?" I asked, between laughing and crying, "I am so very, very glad!"

* * * *

"Well! Aunt Phyllis!" I queried, when we met again. "Have you settled it?"

"Yes! we have decided to wait," she replied, lifting her eyes to those of the only other person present—Mr. Chilton.

"Say rather *you* have, Phyllis; you know my wishes. We have no time to spare, we are both growing old."

"You mean that I am, Ralph; there is no sign of age in you," she said, softly. Then she stooped over his chair, and passed her hand lovingly through his warm, brown hair. "There is not one silver thread yet; but I cannot say the same."

"Silver is pretty when set in ebony," he

replied kindly. "I do not mind grey hair;" then he turned to me. "Miriam, cannot you help me persuade your aunt that a wedding in the house is a delightful thing?" but she answered him.

"You seem to make sure of your father's consent," and she smiled.

"Yes! I am certain of that now, and it is a mystery to me why he ever withheld it. He would not have written and told me to return to England, and to visit Greenholm before coming to him, had he not meant to show his objection was withdrawn, nor would he have sent for you to nurse him; and it was very good of you to go, after the way he had treated you. I shall run over to Glen Avon and get the old man to help me persuade you now, Phyllis; but do you know, I never expected you to be so obdurate."

The smile faded from my aunt's lips.

"If I am so, it is for your sake, Ralph, not my own; but I do not think you must take your father by surprise; he is not well enough to bear a shock, even a joyful one. Suppose you follow me the day after to-morrow."

"Follow you?"

"Yes. Did I not tell you I only got leave for one day?"

"Then I shall return with you."

As he spoke, and before my aunt could reply to him, the servant entered with a telegram on a salver, and handed it to her. Telegrams were not in my line at all, and always seemed to be harbingers of ill-omen: but Aunt Phyllis opened it with unflinching hands. Her composure, however, did not last long, for in another moment tears rose to her dark eyes, and she murmured in an agitated voice,

"Ralph! dear Ralph! he is worse. We must go to him at once."

CHAPTER XVIII.

When Aunt Phyllis and Mr. Ralph Chilton reached Glen Avon the drawn down blinds told the sad news before they even came to the door. The death of its owner had been both sudden and unexpected. The doctor, however infallible generally, had upon this occasion been mistaken, for he had told Aunt Phyllis she might safely leave, as his patient was likely to linger for weeks.

With this doctor the dying man left a letter addressed to Miss Armatage, marked "private," and this the man of medicine

delivered to her when alone, so that Ralph Chilton knew nothing of the matter.

When my aunt found that all was over, she told Mr. Ralph that conventionality demanded that she should return to Greenholm at once. So after giving the necessary instructions with reference to his father's funeral he escorted her home again.

We were very much surprised when they broke in upon our assembled circle, as may be imagined. Colonel Markham had been dining with us, and had just told us an anecdote of one of his experiences in India, when the sound of wheels was heard approaching the door, and in a few minutes one of the servants came to me and whispered that I was wanted in Miss Armatage's little room. When I reached it I found Aunt Phyllis.

"It was all over before we got back," she said, brokenly. "Poor old man! how

I wish I had not left him, he had such a horror of dying alone; but it is too late now to regret anything."

"Oh! auntie, dear, I am so sorry; and how tired and white you look; and I dare say you have had nothing to eat all day."

"Not much, certainly, but we should like some tea quietly up here, you can manage that for us, can you not, and then go back to the table and take no notice. When Colonel Markham is gone it will be time enough to tell our sad news, and Ralph will be undisturbed alone with me here. He was sadly upset at being too late for one kind word."

"Is Mr. Ralph here, auntie; where is he?"

"I left him downstairs. Find him, there's a dear child, and tell him to come up; and you won't forget the tea?"

"No, auntie, I won't forget;" then I

kissed her in silence, there seemed so little to say. I opened the doors of the down-stairs rooms one by one, seeking Mr. Chilton, the drawing-room being the last, and to my surprise I saw my sister, who I had left at the table, standing by his side holding his hand. "Dear Mr. Chilton, dear Ralph," she was saying, her blue eyes swimming in tears, "no one can feel for you as I do; oh! if only I could comfort you, if only I might."

"Your sympathy *does* comfort me," he returned, softly. "You are a dear, feeling child."

"No, I am not a child, Mr. Chilton, do not think of me as such," and she stretched out her second hand to him. "Think of me as your friend; promise me that."

For a moment he looked at her—what a strange, tender look that was. "I promise."

"Florence," I cried. "My dear, why have you left the table?"

"Have I not as much right to do so as you, Miriam?" she asked, coldly.

"Hardly. Aunt Phyllis sent for me." Then I turned to Ralph Chilton. "Mr. Chilton, my aunt is waiting for you upstairs in her study, she asked me to tell you." And as I turned away I felt he must think me wanting in feeling, so I said, "She has told me of your trouble, and I am very sorry for you. You believe me, do you not?" I added, for his expression of face was unusual.

He sighed heavily. "You are all very kind, Miriam, kinder than I deserve; I will go to Phyllis at once," and he left the room without another word.

"Florence, shall we not go back to the dining-room? auntie wishes it."

"I shall remain where I am," she decided.

And I went away with a sad heart, gave orders for tea to be taken up to the little study, and re-entered the dining-room. Colonel Markham was just starting off on a new tack. Sir Charteris looked at me somewhat sternly, and Mrs. Armatage made a signal to Lady Costelion that she wished to retire.

"So we are not to hear your story, Colonel, after all," I remarked, for the sake of something to say.

"But indeed you shall, Miss Costelion," he replied; "it will keep till we reach the drawing-room. I am honoured by your wish to hear my little tale."

So I was to be punished for my small piece of politeness!

The gentlemen joined us earlier than usual that night, and the Colonel, not oblivious of his promise, drew his chair before the fire, stretched out his thin legs,

which always seemed to be keeping imaginary spurs out of the way, placed his elbows on the arms of his chair, and gently poised his finger tips, tapping them together from time to time, while his white moustache seemed to rise at the ends as he began.

"Well, ladies, as you wish to hear it, I have kept my friend, Sir Charteris, waiting for this little experience of mine, which I will put into as few words as possible. I was staying at Delhi on a visit to an old friend who was in the artillery—time flies, that must be fifteen years ago. We were dining at the mess of the Native Infantry Regiment then quartered there, when the conversation turned upon snakes and snake charmers. There was a young griff at the table (that, ladies, is the name we old Indians give to a man who has not been a year in the country). He was an

artillery officer, and had only joined a few months, and was rather inclined to be conceited, to say nothing of his impertinence. This youngster's name was Adams, and looking across the table he addressed his conversation to my friend, who was the Major of his own regiment, and said, 'I will bet you fifty rupees to ten that I will do what no snake charmer in India dares to do.'

"'Indeed, Mr. Adams,' returned the Major. 'Every one knows you are a most wonderful young man, but we should like to hear what particular feat you are now proposing to perform.'

"All at table laughed, but Mr. Adams was not abashed. 'I will back myself to pull a cobra out of any hole you may have him placed in, by his tail,' he said, slowly and clearly.

"For a moment every one was silent, then

a buzz succeeded, the various officers present being desirous of closing with his offer.

"At last the Major spoke out. 'I am not a betting man, Mr. Adams,' he said, 'but on this occasion I cannot let your challenge pass; in fact, I will give you any odds you like that the thing is not to be done—a thousand rupees to one.'

"'Done with you, Major,' returns the young man, eagerly; after which, bets were made on all sides, young Adams accepting them with perfect coolness and composure.

"If I mistake not, this was on a Friday evening, and the following Monday was fixed for the wonderful event to take place.

"In the meantime a snake charmer was to be engaged to bring a fine cobra with poisonous fangs to the scene of action. There was great excitement in the station,

and not only all the gentlemen, but the ladies expressed their intention of being present to see this unprecedented sport. In fact, young Adams had succeeded in rivetting public attention upon himself; at any rate for the time being. You will understand, ladies, that life in India is very different to what it is in England. During the hours when you are abroad, we are behind closed tatties, and when you are asleep we are taking our exercise, so that it was soon after five in the morning that we assembled on the Delhi Mhaidan, or esplanade.

"Mr. Adams very soon turned up, dressed in white flannels, and looking very confident. The snake charmer was also there with one of the familiar round flag baskets in which they carry their reptiles.

"We closely examined the snake to assure ourselves that its fangs were poisonous. A

convenient hole was found in the adjoining common for the cobra to go into when released. The eventful moment came. Adams placed himself in an imposing attitude, one arm behind his back, the other stretched over the hole ready for action. The cobra was placed upon the ground with his head towards the cavity, and immediately began to glide in; when nearly out of sight, as its tail was disappearing from view, Adams seized hold of it, and with a straight arm and dexterous turn of the wrist flung it out upon the open.

"It is impossible to describe the astonishment of the onlookers. After the lapse of a moment the Major came forward in a most generous manner, went up to the youngster, and clapped him kindly on the shoulder, saying, 'You have indeed carried out your boast well, Adams, and earned

your bets, and I for one am contented to lose, having seen such a marvellous feat done by a brother officer. I believe I am the largest loser; but in the name of all present, may I ask, would you mind going through that wonderful performance again?' Adams had no objection whatever, and cheerfully did it a second time; but, ladies, I must confess that I was not satisfied, and many present thought some unfair trickery had been used; therefore I went up to the young man and asked him to do it yet once again as a personal favour to myself. He was proud of his triumph, and I think was glad to protract it.

"Again we examined the cobra. I then placed myself near to the hole to watch the proceedings closely, and make sure there was no optical delusion, and that the reptile really went in. The snake charmer came up as before, and placed the cobra close to

the hole. It wriggled up and looked in. Then, all at once, it reared itself on end, and almost struck me in the eye. I never was in such a fright in my life, and I give you my word I jumped backwards at least six yards; but the astonishing part of the affair is this (and I give you my word of honour, as a gentleman, that the story is true), that snake was not to be done the third time, and as surely as I sit here that cobra *turned round*, and went into the hole *tail first!*"

* * * *

Mr. Chilton went away the next morning to Glen Avon, the estate which was now his own. Aunt Phyllis seldom mentioned him; but I believe he wrote to her most days.

My sister appeared to resent what I had said to her that evening when I had found her with Mr. Chilton. A barrier of reserve

seemed to be growing up between us. I did my best to overthrow it, but was met only by coldness, which, alas! Florence knew too well how to simulate, even if she did not feel it.

More than once I urged upon my aunt to announce her engagement, but she only shook her head.

"No, no, Miriam, I must know and feel sure first that such an engagement is for Ralph's happiness."

"Auntie, how can you question it? There can be no doubt of Mr. Chilton's love and regard for you."

"I do not doubt it, dear," she said, softly; "but, Miriam, there are many sorts of love—very many. What if he feels for me that which he might have towards a dear, elder sister?"

"But you are *not* his senior, auntie."

"No, not actually; but confess the truth,

Miriam, I *seem* so, even to you. I shall wait a year, and if I think it for his happiness, we will be married then. If not, Miriam, I shall not blame him. You will remember I have told you that."

"Auntie, dear, how could I forget it? You are the best woman I ever met."

"Not so, child; not so," she answered, sadly, while I threw my arms around her.

Mr. Chilton was never long absent from Greenholm, but still he did not neglect his duties as a landowner, and spent a large portion of his time at Glen Avon.

Bob had been home to see us, and had brought his cadet's uniform with him, and we were very proud of our young embryo soldier. He was very happy at Sandhurst, and seemed to have made friends both with his officers and comrades.

Trevelyan was to be a barrister. He had

decided on that profession for himself, and was being educated accordingly.

There is not much to tell of my own life during this period. I wrote a little, succeeded a little, and, I fear, fretted a great deal—in silence; for of course I was unhappy about my own affairs, and I was scarcely less so with reference to Aunt Phyllis, Mr. Chilton, and my sister Florence. The former was growing ever gentler and more sad-eyed. The latter *lived* only during the visits of Mr. Chilton, while he came less and less often to the house as the summer wore on. His manner to my aunt was tender and affectionate, but there was ever an increasing restlessness about him, which told its own tale of a heart ill at ease, while to my sister he was fitful and uncertain, at times even cross; but when he saw the tears rush to the blue eyes, ah! then he would seem well nigh beside him-

self. It was painfully evident to me that a cruel struggle was going on in the man's mind. On the one hand, a tried affection, and a deep respect; on the other, a sudden fancy and a blind passion.

Which would bring the greatest happiness, I well knew. To give up such love as Aunt Phyllis's for that of my sister Florence was like flinging away a diamond in the rough to take possession of a sparkling cut crystal.

Whichever way I looked, I could see nothing but misery. My sister was wilful and delicate; what would be the consequence if she were crossed in this new love of hers? Indeed, had not the doctors begged that she might have her own way in *everything!*

Would she make herself really ill over her disappointment? I loved my sister very much, and was grieved for her, yet I

could not see that it was right that she should supplant Aunt Phyllis and rob her of her love, her patient well tried love, just because she was younger, more sparkling, more beautiful. It seemed very, very hard.

These thoughts were preying upon my mind and making me really unwell.

Mr. Chilton was at the house on a visit, and I was in a state of nervous excitement which prostrated me. I could have laughed or cried at any moment, had any one raised a finger to point at me.

Dinner was over; it was an August evening, close and warm. Aunt Phyllis and I both longed for quietness, so she had carried me off to her own little room upstairs. That room had a bay window, and in the bay was a small sofa; upon this my aunt placed me, and taking a chair sat beside me, and in that gloaming light we talked until I fell asleep.

When I awoke the curtains had been drawn, closing me out from the room. In it a light burned faintly, and voices reached me.

"The year is not yet up, Ralph, that I told you we must wait, and to which you agreed."

"No; but circumstances alter cases. I want to get away from England. I want to travel. You must see that I am restless, Phyllis. It is cruel of you to delay our marriage."

"Yes. I do see that you are restless," she answered. "*Why is it?*"

For a moment there was a pause, and I could hear his breath coming fast and thick.

"I cannot answer your question," he said at length, "there are some things which one cannot explain even to oneself. My life has been a somewhat roving one. I dare

say it is that; I can give no other reason."

"Ralph," said my aunt, in a low, earnest tone, "I can help you. I can tell you why it is. I do not blame you, dear, remember that, always. I do not blame you, even in my heart; but you love—not me—but another."

A long, long silence followed. Then a sound that was half a sob, half a groan; and I thought the strong man's head was bowed upon his hands.

I felt that I ought not to be there listening. Yet what could I do? Had Aunt Phyllis forgotten me, or had she closed me in there on purpose?

I never was so puzzled in my life how to act. It would be most unpleasant to me to announce my presence, and doubly so to Mr. Chilton, and while I was yet hesitating what I ought

or ought not to do the conversation continued.

"Phyllis, dear Phyllis! it is not so bad as you think. Your niece has, I confess, thrown a glamour over me. But it will pass; it is nothing compared with my old tried affection for you. Let me get away from her, and the fancy will fade. Phyllis, Phyllis, be my wife, and believe that I am true to you," and I knew that he was holding her in his strong arms.

"You have forgotten one thing, Ralph," she said, very gently. "My niece's happiness. Ah! you flinch from that subject; nevertheless, we must consider it. You met her before you had seen me again, and all unknown to yourself she crept into your heart; and she, believing you to be free, loved you. Is it not so?"

"Believe me, I have not sought her love," he returned, in a voice of pain.

"No, Ralph; you do not seek love, you command it. I do not blame Florence, any more than I do you; but her feelings must be thought of. She is very delicate. She is a poor hand at bearing trouble, and we must shield her from it, if we can."

"Phyllis, do you mean that you will not marry me?" he asked, sadly.

"Yes, Ralph, I love you so dearly, your happiness is more to me than my own, a thousand times; and forgive me, dear, I could not be content with *half a heart.* I have expected so very much; I cannot accept less."

"That is strange logic, Phyllis; think well before you decide my life. If you will not marry me I shall start for the Holy Land at once. I have long wished to go there, and change of scene will be necessary for me. But, oh! my dear, come with me. Remember that since boyhood every thought

of my future life has had you as its centre. You have mingled with every plan, every dream."

"Yes, Ralph, as I was, in girlhood; but you forgot the passing time, and the change you would find in me, and so did I for awhile."

"Yes! you are altered, dear; but it is after all the same sweet face, and for the rest, your mind has ripened into greater perfection, Phyllis."

"Well, Ralph, pay your visit to the Holy Land, and come back to us with all your restlessness gone, and we will see what is for your happiness."

A few words more, a sound which told that they had kissed, and the door closed. Then Aunt Phyllis sunk upon her knees and prayed, and I heard the words, "Lord, give me strength to do what is right," and parting the curtains I looked into the room,

and saw that she was weeping. In another moment I was by her side, with my arms about her.

"Auntie, dear auntie, I have heard all! Was I very wrong to stay there? I did not like to come out, as I was aware that you knew I was on the sofa."

"I had forgotten you, little Miriam; but never mind, we did not talk any treason, after all. No, child, I do not blame you; it was a difficult position to be placed in."

"Oh! auntie, if you would only marry him," I urged, mingling my tears with hers; but she put my wishes aside.

"I will wait and see if he outgrows his love for your sister, dear, and whether her liking for him proves a lasting one. I cannot sacrifice the happiness of two lives that my day-dream should become a reality.

So he went away, and Florence grew

paler and more wan; the old listlessness returned, the old discontent; the old cough came back, and we became very anxious about her.

One day Aunt Phyllis called me into her room. "Miriam," she said, "this must not go on. Your sister will go into a decline if this lasts much longer. I have written to Ralph and begged him to come back at once."

"And will he do so?"

"Yes."

"What will follow, Aunt Phyllis?"

"He will marry Florence, and God grant that they may both be very happy!"

"Amen," I said, simply; and we took one another's hands and remained quiet and silent.

It was done. Aunt Phyllis had sacrificed herself for others, and I knew of no words wherewith to comfort her.

So Ralph Chilton returned and was to be my brother now instead of my uncle.

How Aunt Phyllis bore the sight of those two together is more than I can tell; but she did bear it manfully.

It had been settled between them that Florence had better know nothing of the dead past of their lives for all their sakes, so that the girl talked of her love and joy to auntie freely, little dreaming of the pain she was inflicting.

Ralph, too, was a different man—his difficult position over, his honour satisfied; he gave himself up to loving the beautiful girl who was to be his wife; and since Aunt Phyllis made no sign of suffering, doubtless he taught himself to believe that she preferred her freedom, and that things were best as they were. As for my sister, happiness seemed to have given her new life, and to have made her a different

woman. Her good qualities blossomed under the sunshine of love.

She was very tender to me at that time, and would often talk to me of Herbert, and wish my joy were as full as her own; and had it not been for poor Aunt Phyllis and for Sir Gordon Graham there would have been no cloud upon my satisfaction at the turn events had taken in her life. As it was, I felt I must fulfil my promise of writing to Sir Gordon to tell him what had happened, and I could but sorrow for them both in silence, for it was impossible to even touch softly the deep, deep wound from which my dear aunt was suffering, and only by a tender look or a sympathetic hand-clasp could I venture to express my feelings toward her. I judged by myself that no words could be possible either to speak or to listen to, and it was evident that she appreciated and understood my

silence, for she would come and rest her head upon my shoulder and seem to lean on me mentally for support, as I had done so often on her in my sorrow, and her dear eyes would be dim with unshed tears.

Poor Aunt Phyllis! her trouble was so much worse than mine. I still had hope, but from her it had been utterly cut away.

It was not to be a long engagement, and my sister's wedding day came round, as everything will come, must come, whether it be joy or sorrow. Good and evil, evil and good, each in its turn; and on the whole, I suppose things are fairly balanced, if we can only believe it and remember that the sun cannot shine everywhere at the same time.

It did not shine for Aunt Phyllis on my sister's wedding day; but she bore up bravely, never once faltering till all was

over; then I missed her, and fearing that the tension had been too great, I went to search for her with a sort of feeling that she was needing me.

I found her kneeling by her bedside, but quite insensible; her spirit had been brave indeed, but nature had at last asserted herself, and strength had failed her. I was unwilling to call for assistance, knowing as I did how people's tongues will wag, and how apt they are to put two and two together, often fixing upon the truth, and I was afraid lest any suspicion of my aunt's secret should be the result.

She was slight and small, and although neither big nor strong myself, I managed to lift her upon the bed, and covering her with blankets I ran down stairs and obtained mustard and flour from the storeroom. The feeble action of her heart had alarmed me, and I determined to put a

plaster over it, and if that did not bring relief to go myself for the doctor. I also made some hot brandy and water, which I forced between her teeth from time to time, and rubbed the cold hands persistently. At length I was rewarded by hearing a sigh, and Aunt Phyllis wept at last in my arms like a tired child. Dear good, faithful Aunt Phyllis! and her last words to me that night were earnest desires for the happiness of Ralph Chilton and his young wife.

CHAPTER XIX.

I DO not think I have ever mentioned that Miss Montague had passed into her rest, but such was the case; and my dear old friend, Miss Caroline, had been pleading with me for months to come and stay with her and her only surviving sister, and at length I went. Aunt Phyllis was going about her duties as usual, and had promised to take every care of Sir Charteris in my absence.

Miss Caroline was overjoyed at seeing me again. How she had grown to love me so deeply I cannot imagine, for I fear I

have few good qualities to recommend me, and very little beauty; still I never doubted my dear old friend's warm affection, even in those days when I had not received the final proof of it.

There were many letters of Herbert's for me to read which dear Miss Caroline freely showed me, and in each I found some mention of myself, which made me feel very happy, and from one I learned a secret which I had not been intended to know, and gained the key to what had been so long a time a mystery to me. It was a letter written considerably more than a year ago which I was perusing, and it was evident that Miss Caroline had forgotten its contents, or she would not have placed it in my hands. One part of it ran thus:

"I am more than glad, dear Miss Caroline, that you mentioned to my good parents the wish of my dear Miriam to have back her old favourite. They bought

Shamrock for love of her, and I feel certain they can have no greater pleasure than in adding in ever so slight a manner to her happiness; and I am also glad that they have not let her know from whence the pony came, for though I do not believe my darling would mind accepting so small a favour at the hands of the father and mother of the man who loves her better than aught else in the world, yet there are others who might consider it an obligation, and my dear girl might not be allowed to retain her pet; as it is he cannot be sent back."

I raised my eyes, filled with tears of gratitude, to Miss Caroline's face.

"Oh! why did you not tell me?" I gasped; "they must think me so ungrateful; they would be sure to imagine that I should guess, but I never did, really."

"My dear child, what are you talking about?" she asked, bewildered.

"About Shamrock," I returned, half laughing, half crying. "Oh! I am so glad to owe the pleasure of possessing him to Herbert's parents, and you must let me thank them now I am aware of it."

"What! surely, my dear, I have not given you that letter?" asked my old friend, with comic contrition; "dear, dear, dear, what will they say to me? I thought I had put it away."

"But you see you didn't," I said, kissing her impetuously, "and I am so glad you did not; it has made me so much happier, and you *must* let me write and thank them. I will explain away all blame from you, and when they know how glad it has made me they cannot be vexed."

"Very well, Miriam, my dear, as you will; we all make mistakes sometimes, and they cannot blame me very greatly, so do as you please."

So I wrote and received a kind and loving answer from Mrs. Armstrong, who told me they were looking forward to the time when the shadows should have cleared from their dear boy's path and mine—the

clouds from the horizon of his happiness; and she added she had faith that the day would come.

I went to see all those who had been kind to me at Little Newington, and from two at any rate I received really warm welcomes. Mr. Radcliffe looked older and graver, yet somehow there was a nobler and finer expression upon his face, and I felt that he had used his trial well and come out a better and even a more unselfish man. He was honestly glad to see me, and begged me to tell him all about my sister's marriage, and the husband whom she had chosen; after which he talked of Aunt Phyllis and his great admiration for her character. Mr. Lyndhurst, too, was right glad to see me, and I must confess I was none the less so to meet him again, for I had the sincerest regard for him, and was proud to own his friendship.

I did not, however, spend a great length of time at the Manor House, being afraid of putting too much toil upon Aunt Phyllis. I think they were all glad to have me home again, though they said they wished I had remained longer with my kind friend, Miss Caroline; and she, I know, was sorry to part with me—or am I vain? One thing I regretted, namely, that Bob had paid a flying visit to Greenholm during my absence, for I should have loved to see him.

It soon became evident to me that grandmamma Costelion had something upon her mind, and I felt sure that it would not be very long before I heard all about it. So, being anxious to get it over, I followed her to her room upon the first opportunity.

"Miriam," she said sternly, "you and your brother are of the same flesh and blood."

"Well! yes, grandmamma, I suppose so,"

I returned smiling, "or something nearly akin to it."

"Do not joke, Miriam, the subject is serious; you are in a measure responsible for your brother's faults, as a man is liable for the debts of his wife; he does not contract them, he may even disapprove of them, but he must prevent them, or he will have to pay them."

"What am I to prevent Bob from doing, grandmamma?" I asked, unable to restrain my amusement.

She came close to me, as one who wishes to tell a secret which no other ear is to hear.

"Miriam, your brother has taken to smoking!"

"What of that?" I replied, "most men do smoke in these days; is there any harm in it?"

"Harm!" she echoed, "harm! and you a Costelion! I tell you, child, that it is

disgusting; it is dirty, it is extravagant, and it is wicked; yes, wicked to waste the saliva which God has given. The Costelions may have had faults, Miriam, but such a filthy habit as smoking has never been among them."

"You do not, then, agree with Cowper in calling tobacco 'the pungent, nose-refreshing weed,' grandmamma," I replied; "and I believe he went on in verse to inform us that it quickened and refined thought."

"If Cowper talked so like a fool he ought to have been put in a lunatic asylum; and as for Sir Walter Raleigh, he ought to have been hanged for introducing so pernicious a practice."

"I think I once heard or read an amusing story about him," I said, trying to turn her anger, "or else I dreamt it; it ran to this effect: that his servant coming in, and

seeing him smoking, *thought he was on fire*, and soused him through and through with water *to put him out*, which I should think it did effectually in both senses of the word."

But Lady Costelion would not laugh.

"Any man who smokes is a fool," she decided.

"Yet we are told, grandmamma, that Sir Isaac Newton was an inveterate smoker, and we hear of Milton taking a pipe and a glass of water before going to bed; and Lord Byron smoked."

"Yes, and that was not his only fault; but to my mind it was the worst. Miriam, I am surprised to hear you stand up for so bad a custom," she added severely.

"You mistake me, grandmamma. I like the smell of smoke as little as yourself indoors; I do not, however, object to it in the open air, and I am sorry to hear that

Bob has taken to it; but I suppose where young men are together, as they are at Sandhurst, such things will occur; and doubtless there must be some great charm in it, or it would never bring all sorts and conditions of men into subjection as it does; in fact, I read a paragraph, the other day, praising the use of tobacco, which stated that there were many more female lunatics than male, and giving as a reason for it, that the women did not smoke."

"Miriam!!!"

"Yes, grandmamma."

"I am ashamed of you.,'

"I am so sorry for that, dear," I returned, not at all humbled, "but I hope you will forgive me, and Bob, too, before long."

Then I kissed her, and ran down stairs to find Aunt Phyllis, who laughed at the little tale I carried to her of Lady Costelion's wholesale condemnation.

"You see, dear, Sir Charteris has never smoked," she finished; "and I fear he, too, may be vexed with Bob, as well as his mother, but we will hope for the best; Bob is a truly good fellow, even if he has contracted a foolish habit, but we will take comfort, Miriam, for many good and noble men smoke, our own premier for one, and no one can be more worthy of admiration than Lord Beaconsfield."

"Then you think there is a chance for poor Bob, still," I replied, smiling into the kind sweet face.

"Yes! dear, just a little," she said softly, "and, to tell the truth, I do not dislike the smell of the weed; it reminds me of the old days that are gone, when Ralph and I were young. He was a smoker you know, Miriam, and is still for the matter of that. By the by, did you hear from your sister to-day?"

"Yes, dear auntie, she and Ralph are well."

"And happy?" she questioned, searching my face for a reply.

"And happy; they are enjoying Italy. Perhaps you would like to see the letter."

So I placed it in her hand, and went away that she might read it alone.

* * * * *

Aunt Phyllis had a visitor, and that visitor was Colonel Markham. I was not particularly fond of the old Indian officer, whose stories I had heard all through, and found the second edition somewhat tedious. I knew exactly when he would stretch out his legs, when he would pull his long white moustache, when his fingers would be poised, when he would look fierce, when meek; for the colonel had learnt his part so well that he never forgot the smallest minutiæ. But when he

went away I ran in to keep auntie company, and was surprised to see her looking as if something unusual had happened.

The Colonel's visit! I hit upon the truth at once.

"Aunt Phyllis," I cried, "he has proposed to you." And the flush that mounted to the sweet pale face was sufficient verification of the truth of my suspicions.

"Well, I admire his taste, auntie!" I said, laughing and kissing her, "but I think he is an impudent old fellow to dream of you for a wife; why! he might well be your father—the idea!"

"Age is nothing when people care for each other," she replied quietly. "I can imagine a far younger woman than myself loving an old man dearly."

"But not Colonel Markham," I exclaimed, "Why! he is as yellow as a lemon, and I should think as sour."

"His complexion is the effect of many years' exposure to an Indian sun. Suppose, now, that Herbert should return with one similar," she added slyly.

"Heaven forbid!" I ejaculated fervently.

"Why, you would love him none the less, dear," she asserted quietly. "And as to Colonel Markham, I think you have a groundless dislike to him. Do you know, Miriam, he is a very good hearted man. I have been cognizant of many acts of kindness of his, done in secret."

"Well, auntie, I must confess it has been a case of Dr. Fell with me. I cannot tell why I dislike him, but I know I do; perhaps it is because I do not believe a word he says."

"He tells traveller's tales, certainly," my aunt acceded," "but that is rather the fashion among old Indians."

"Auntie," I cried, "if you persist in taking this old 'Chutnee's' part, I shall begin to believe you return his admiration!"

"Then, do not *go on* believing it, dear Miriam," she returned gently; "and now let us leave the Colonel alone. Will you come with me for a walk? the two grandmammas want a cartload of wool, and I have a few cottage visits to pay. Although Sir Charteris does not like your district visiting, still he will not mind your coming occasionally with me; and it will do us both good to see how much sorrow and suffering there is everywhere around us. I always come back more contented with my lot; it is wonderful how patient the poor are under their privations, although they leave an indelible stamp upon their faces. Bread winning is hard and weary work, Miriam, and hardening work, too;

those who are always at labour, who have to take thought for the next day's loaf, have not much time or opportunity to think of higher things; but our Heavenly Father, does not expect impossibilities, and He will accept our honest labours as service to Himself, if we perform it in His love and fear."

"And can you make the poor understand this, auntie?"

"I try, Miriam, and I sow my seed in hope."

* * * * *

There is little to write about during the passing of that year. We had a visit from Florence and her husband on their way homeward. That was a trial time to Aunt Phyllis, but she bore it bravely.

Ralph Chilton and his wife seemed very happy; but I noticed one thing, and not without dismay, namely, that she was both

jealous and requiring, two things which I thought very unlikely to conduce to ultimate happiness in their married life, especially with a man who had so long enjoyed the untrammelled liberty which he had for so many years been accustomed to, with no one to consult but himself and his own tastes. Now, he could not leave the house without being asked whither he was going, nor return, unless he stated in full where he had been; and I could see that he chafed under this surveillance, though the glamour was still upon him which had drawn him from Aunt Phyllis's side, and, to my mind, from the path of honour; but this opinion would be treason in auntie's eyes. And he caressed his wife into silence, or humoured her childish queries, while I could but ask myself how long such a state of things was likely to last, and I read my answer in the deepening sadness

of Aunt Phyllis's eyes; she feared for their happiness as well as myself.

* * * * *

Dear old Bob was now an officer; we had been down to see him in his hut at Aldershot, and had attended a dance given by his regiment. He seemed thoroughly happy in the life he had chosen, and his Colonel spoke of him in glowing terms to Sir Charteris, as a most promising young man.

How glad I was to note that the care marks had vanished from his brow.

Bob and I were getting quite old people, I told him we must begin looking out for our grey hairs, for he was three, and I four and twenty; at which he laughingly and lovingly smoothed my dusky head, and told me never to mind.

I did not mind, except for one reason—Herbert! would he love me as well? would he mind my being changed?

I did not doubt him, but I could not forget my Aunt Phyllis's fate. Surely, it would not be mine; and my heart cried lustily, "No! my lover would be true."

Our life at that time was particularly even, but it was not long to continue so. I received a letter from my brother-in-law, asking me to come down to Glen Avon, to stay with his wife, "who (he feared), was very far from strong or well;" that was all he said, but it opened an avenue of uneasiness in my mind.

When Aunt Phyllis was alone, I gave her that letter, and watched her face as she perused it.

"You must go, Miriam!" she said firmly, when she had finished it.

"Do you judge that there is—much wrong?" I asked, nervously.

"Yes! Ralph is not usually so reticent. I fear something is the matter beyond ill-

health; had that been all he would have given it a name, and not have left us uneasy for nothing."

After a pause, I said. "I will go to-day, auntie; but first, I must tell papa."

"Do not alarm him about your sister; say merely that she and Ralph want you to come."

"Yes! my thoughtful auntie, I am glad you told me."

CHAPTER XX.

I WENT that very day to Glen Avon. Of course, I was not expected, but I got a fly from the station, and arrived at my destination in safety.

What a lovely place it was, that home of my sister's! scarcely less beautiful than dear old Kingsholm, only in a different style. How soft and sleepy the scenery looked all around it, with a faint vapour like a haze mellowing every outline, and the Avon flowing lazily by. While the picturesque house stood in the vale, with the rising park land behind.

I am not clever at architecture, but I know that Glen Avon was perfect of its kind, and I thought that my sister ought indeed to be happy in such a home, with the husband of her love.

Upon one of the terraces, a man was walking with bent head and slow steps. Surely *that* could not be Ralph Chilton! but it was. At the sound of wheels he looked up, hurried down the steps, and came to me in the carriage drive. "This is kind of you, Miriam!" he exclaimed, "but I did not expect you so soon."

"I felt a little uneasy at your letter, Ralph," I returned, submitting to his brotherly embrace, "and thought I had better come at once. Aunt Phyllis and I feared something was wrong."

"Yes, something *is* wrong, Miriam, very wrong, but God only knows what." Then

suddenly, "Did you show Phyllis my letter?"

"Yes."

"Ah! I thought you would," he said, with a sigh "that was why I said nothing more."

"You cannot have a better adviser than my aunt," I said warmly.

"No one knows that more fully than I do, Miriam," he answered, with a wistful look,"and no one can tell how sorely I miss her gentle guidance at every turn; but I have only myself to blame for the loss of it. That I am aware of too, and it would be ungenerous to trouble her with my affairs now that I have made a muddle of them. Miriam, I believe there is a vein of madness in most men, and I am sure I have had my turn," he added bitterly.

"Will you dismiss the cabman for me," I returned prosaically, "and let me go in doors. Florence may have seen me arrive."

"No, she is in her boudoir, at the other side of the house; she will not know you are here, and I should like a few words with you in the library before you go to her."

A servant now appeared at the door, and my small amount of luggage was carried in. It was evident that I was not expected, and that no room had been prepared for me, by the butler's puzzled looks, and I felt that he was eyeing me critically. Ralph was, however, not the man to give any explanation to his servants, and without a word, he led me to the library, where he generally sat.

"Well now, what have you foolish children been quarrelling about?" I asked, as cheerfully as I could.

"Heaven only knows; everything, I believe; it is a constant jar, and yet I cannot point to any one especial cause of our domestic misery, but miserable we are

undoubtedly. *Nothing* satisfies my wife now; whatever I say is wrong, whatever I do is wrong; yet, I once thought she *loved* me; now I know it was but a passing fancy, and I threw away pure gold for the electro sham."

"Do not say that, Ralph; whatever my sister's faults may be, she loved you dearly when she married you; of that I am certain."

"I am glad you think so; but the fact remains that now she hates me."

"Ralph!"

"Well! judge for yourself, Miriam; I will say no more. How is Phyllis?"

"She is never very strong," I replied, sadly, "but she is as sweet and good as ever, and as anxious for your happiness. And now, shall I go to my sister? You must try and make it up with her, Ralph, and let bygones be bygones."

"God knows I would gladly do any-

thing, but I have no idea how I have offended, nor why she has changed towards me."

"Does your conscience whisper nothing?"

"Nothing, Miriam, nothing whatever."

"Well! we must see what can be done; will you tell her that I am here."

"No, better not; go in to her alone, she does not expect you, but it will be a pleasant surprise, she often wishes for you to be with her." So we walked over the richly carpeted hall (in which a magnificent billiard table stood surrounded by rich settles), where our footsteps gave no sound, and to the right, out of the hall, he opened a door, and admitting me, closed it again.

It was summer, but a fire burned in the beautifully tiled grate, and my sister sat before it, upon a low, luxurious chair, with her head resting upon one of her hands, and her blue eyes fixed wearily upon the gleaming embers.

It was an exquisite room, furnished in the perfection of taste and costliness; the draperies of the palest French grey, with a delicate tracery of pink heather. The mantel board was covered with grey velvet, upon which was a deep hanging of rare old Spanish point; exquisite china, and beautifully executed statuary met my gaze whichever way I turned, and water-colour drawings and Venetian mirrors decked the walls; and it was evident the apartment had but lately been furnished with loving care.

The surroundings were all such as my sister most cared for, such as she had longed, and even pined for. Now, they were all hers, her very own, and they appeared to bring her no pleasure, for there was discontent written upon every drooping line of the beautiful face. A sweet little table was by her side which matched the mantel piece, and upon it lay a book,

flung aside with the leaves crumpled, and I heard her sigh as I advanced to her side.

"Are you astonished to see me, Florence dear?" I asked, as I knelt by her. She showed no surprise, she prided herself upon never doing so, but I think she was glad to see me.

"Why! Miriam, have you dropped from the clouds?" she asked, a faint smile lighting up the pale face; the words were not very warm ones, but she took me by both my hands and kissed me affectionately.

"You do not ask what brought me," I said. "Ralph wrote that you were not very well, and Aunt Phyllis and I felt rather anxious, so I thought I would run down and take a peep at you."

"Well, I am glad you came, I am sadly moped here. My husband cares nothing for society, otherwise I might find some

distraction in that; as it is, sometimes I think I shall die of *ennui*. I am sure I wonder he took the trouble to let you know I was ill, the subject could have held very little interest for him," she said coldly.

"Indeed, I should think it holds a *great deal*, Flo, for one who loves you so dearly."

Oh! how her beautiful lip curled.

"My dear child, you are not married, or you would know that that sort of thing never outlasts the honeymoon."

"Florence, dear, I hope you have not grown cynical," I said, trying to turn the matter into a joke.

"Have I? Well, there are some things which make one cynical;" then suddenly, after a pause, "How is papa?"

"He is wonderfully well, for him; of course the effects of that attack will remain, otherwise he is all right. But Aunt Phyllis seems unusually weakly."

"I did not enquire for Aunt Phyllis," returned my sister, in an icy tone.

"No, dear, you did not," I answered, firmly, "though I am sure it was an oversight." But for all that I was far from certain, for Florence had been too fond of Aunt Phyllis to forget her.

"Well, Miriam, you had better come and take off your things," she said, suddenly, rising as she spoke. "I will go with you, and give orders for your room being prepared."

Then she turned to me with genuine feeling at last, and threw her arms around my neck.

"Miriam, dear, stay with me as long as ever you can," she murmured, and I promised that I would.

Those were not happy weeks to me at Glen Avon. It is far from pleasant to be the shuttlecock between two opposing

battledores. I often got into severe scrapes on both sides for trying to make the best of matters.

We are told "We cannot serve God and Mammon," and I found it very true with regard to Florence and her husband—not that I wish to insinuate that either was mammon, but merely to illustrate that it is impossible to please two conflicting parties, however much you may try, and let your motives be ever so good. When I had not offended Florence I had offended Ralph, and *vice versâ*, and I was altogether a very miserable little person; still I did my best to make peace between the belligerents, but with very poor results.

Not a day passed upon which there was not some subdued dispute and bickering—some covert thrust from my sister, some indignant remonstrance from Ralph.

That she had tired out his affection I felt

but too sadly sure, but what had caused her bitter antagonism I was unable to elicit.

On the whole, I thought it was wonderful how he bore with her, though it seemed to me to be from the motive of peace at any price rather than from love.

I had been there two months, and was longing to get home for a sight of Aunt Phyllis, and wondering if I dared leave. There had been comparative peace for awhile, but alas! it had been that calm which precedes a storm.

I entered the drawing-room, having made up my mind to announce my determination to go home for a time at any rate, when on opening the door I heard voices raised in anger.

"Go, go, by all means," cried my sister; "I hope I may never see your traitor face again!"

"Florence," returned Ralph, pale as

death, "I *insist* upon an explanation of your words; this is not the first time that you have accused me of something—treachery you call it; but I *will* know what it is you mean."

"*Will* you?" she returned, insolently, "and if I decline to inform you?"

"Then you shall have your wish—you shall see my face no more."

"That *would* be a heavy punishment!" she replied, sarcastically.

"Then that is your decision?" asked my brother-in-law.

"It is."

The door opened and closed, and a silence ensued, then I flung myself on my knees before my sister.

"Florence, for God's sake unsay what you have said. Tell me of what you accuse your husband. I am doubly certain that you have no just cause of complaint against

him. You are angry with him, and your judgment is warped. My dear, dear sister, *reflect* before you send from you a husband who would be kind, good, and loving if only you would let him; and remember that such a breach as you are making may *never* be healed. Do, do reflect, dear. Has not papa had unhappiness enough? What will become of you if you quarrel with Ralph? You would have to go back to Aunt Phyllis."

"Indeed, I would *not!*" she returned, sharply.

"Then, dear, what *would* you do?"

"I do not know," she said, after a long pause, "but I would rather beg my bread than bear this life. Now put yourself in my place, Miriam. If you had married a man and found out afterwards that he did not love you—that he never had, never would love you—tell me how you would feel," she cried, passionately.

"But, my dear, dear sister, this *cannot* be your case. Ralph loved you dearly when he married you, and indeed loves you still – if you would let him; but you throw back his affection upon itself, until you have driven him well nigh out of his senses. Call him back, or let me, dear. You know the advice of the old song, Flo, and good advice it is indeed; if people would but follow it more often we should have less sorrow in the world. Florence, dear, do 'call him back and kiss him.' I believe the song referred to the other sex, but the plan will hold equally good with both."

"I wonder, Miriam, you can talk such frivolous nonsense when you know what trouble I am in," returned my sister, bursting into passionate tears.

I could not bear it. I was certain that she loved him still, else why this injustice, this violent resentment; so I crept away

and tapped at the library door—once—twice—thrice; then Ralph opened it himself, and stood before me, pale and stern.

"Did you want me, Miriam?"

"Yes! I want you very much. May I come in?"

He admitted me, and gave me a chair, but stood himself, and it was evident that he meant me to bear the brunt of the conversation, for by no word would he assist me.

"Ralph," I said at length, "pray do not let this extraordinary estrangement from my sister assume undue proportions; she is crying as if her heart would break. Be generous and go to her—all may yet be well between you."

"Did she charge you with this message?" he asked, coldly.

"No! I have come of my own accord."

"Then I am sorry my answer must be

that I cannot follow out your suggestion. Indeed, I am about to leave home."

"Ralph! you cannot mean it—for how long?"

"God only knows."

"My dear brother, pray wait; sleep upon this decision of your's. Think of the position in which both you and Florence will be placed—married, yet apart. I cannot imagine anything more likely to injure you both in every way."

"I agree with you, Miriam, that the position is an unfortunate one; but your sister has forced it upon me."

"And you really mean to leave your home and her?" I questioned, pitifully.

"I do."

"Oh! Ralph, you will repent it Where are you going?"

"I have no plans whatever—I cannot tell."

A long pause followed.

"Ralph, make me one promise: Aunt Phyllis is the best friend you ever had; always let her know where you are to be found; pray do not refuse me this request."

"I will not," he replied. "And, Miriam, you are a good girl. I know you have done your best for me, although sometimes I have not done you justice; and remember, whatever may follow, that when I made your sister my wife I loved her truly; but now—now I know that I have made a life-long mistake in giving up Phyllis. You can tell her what I have said to you if you will."

Then he stretched out both his hands to me as a drowning man might for support, and before I could recover myself he was gone, and I sat there helplessly, stupidly, silently, letting the valuable moments pass unheeded.

Ralph Chilton did not appear that evening at dinner—he was not there next morning at breakfast. Luncheon time came and he did not return; a second dinner, but no sign of him.

My sister maintained a quiet, calm composure which surprised me—which must, I felt sure, be kept up by a marvellous effort on her part.

A week—two weeks—a month, and Ralph Chilton remained away. I was obliged to write the sad story to Aunt Phyllis; I made the best of it, but still it could be only a sad, sad story.

One thing somewhat puzzled me—Florence never suggested leaving Glen Avon. In her place I could not have remained there, but I felt it was better as it was. While she was in her husband's house the separation was not so complete, and was not known to the outside world.

My sister seldom mentioned any of her family—*never* her husband or Aunt Phyllis. I longed to get back to Greenholm, but felt it to be my duty to remain with Florence.

It was two months since Ralph had left home, and it was evident that my sister's calmness was giving way; and it was equally evident that she was ill in body as well as in mind, so ill that I sent for her doctor, who looked grave and troubled, and signed to me to accompany him when he left her room. I followed him downstairs into the drawing-room.

"Miss Costelion," he said, gravely, "it will be as well for you to send for Mr. Chilton—he should be at home at such a crisis; and I consider it my duty to tell you that I am most uneasy with regard to your sister. I find about her a most unusual and unaccountable degree of excitement, which at such a time is likely to

prove most harmful, and may be fatal. If you have a mother I should advise her to come to Mrs. Chilton; you probably have not had much experience in such matters, and you do not look very well yourself, Miss Costelion."

"No, I have not, and my dear mother has long gone to rest; but I will write to Aunt Phyllis."

"Aunt Phyllis! ah! that name should go with a sweet character. Send for Aunt Phyllis by all means, and Miss Costelion, pardon me if my remark savours of impertinence, but if there is anything on Mrs. Chilton's mind, which I fear, try and get it relieved, for she will have a hard time of it."

All that day I watched by my sister. I had telegraphed for my aunt, and knew well that she would come; but the hours of waiting seemed interminable.

At length a sound of wheels struck upon my ear. Florence was dozing, but she heard it too; she sprang up with dilated eyes. "Miriam! do you hear? Is it Ralph? has he come home? go, go, and see."

I knew too well that it was not, but I obeyed her, and met Aunt Phyllis in the hall.

We went into Florrie's pretty boudoir.

"Well!" she interrogated.

"Oh! it is *not* well, dear auntie. She is very, very ill; but I am so glad you have come. If anyone can help her, it is you. How I wish Ralph were here! When she heard your carriage drive up she fancied he had returned."

"Poor girl! if he forgave her to-morrow it must be many a long day before he could return. Miriam, by now he is in Africa—he has gone there for the sport."

"Oh! auntie, who told you? how do you know?"

"He has kept the promise he gave you, Miriam: he wrote to me; and, oh! child, he seems quite broken-hearted. I did it for the best, God knows. I thought it was for his happiness, but I fear my judgment erred. Miriam, do you think they will ever be reconciled?"

"I do not know, auntie; but I am sure of one thing, that if anyone upon this earth can bring it about, that person is yourself. Will you try, my dear, good Aunt Phyllis?"

A pause, a lifting of the dear grave face, two eloquent eyes—then, "With God's help I will"—and we kissed in silence, which meant more than words; and I returned to my sister, Aunt Phyllis following me.

Florence was sitting up in her bed, two burning spots upon her cheeks, and fever in her eyes. "Is it Ralph?" she cried.

"Tell him I want him. Oh! Miriam, he has been away eight whole weeks!" and she burst into a passion of tears.

"Hush! hush! my darling, it is not Ralph, but it is someone else come to comfort you—it is Aunt Phyllis!"

"Aunt Phyllis," she cried, "Aunt Phyllis! do not let her come near me; she has been the cause of all my trouble. Miriam, she is as bad as Ralph, and worse; do not make me see her. She loves him—loves my husband. There! now you know my secret. I found it out accidentally, and then he pretended love for me! Why, why have they treated me so? And now I suppose she has come to see me die—then—then she will marry Ralph. She is not *my* aunt, you know; there is no blood relationship between us, and she will marry my husband!"

And she fell back fainting.

"Why did you not tell me of this, Miriam?" asked my aunt, coming forward.

"Because I did not know it, Aunt Phyllis."

We did all we could to bring her round, and at length the white lids quivered over the blue eyes, and my aunt signed to me to move out of sight; then she offered my sister some refreshment, but she turned away.

"Not from you," she murmured.

"Why not from me, my dear niece?" said Aunt Phyllis, softly.

"*You* ask me *why?*" said Florence, excitedly; "does not your own conscience tell you?"

"No."

"Then listen, I have found you out, and I have found him out. You and Ralph love one another!"

"Of course we do," she replied, gently. "We have been friends since childhood."

"Friends; aye, and lovers. Aunt Phyllis, you dare not deny it."

"I have no desire to do so, Florence. Many, many years ago, when Ralph and I were, so to speak, boy and girl, we were sweethearts truly; but Ralph's father did not think me a sufficiently good match for his son and heir, and I would not marry without his consent; so he went away—abroad. You know when he came back, Florence: well, before I ever saw him again he had found out that his old fancy had proved a mistake, and he had learnt to love a fair young girl, who was there to meet him instead of poor Aunt Phyllis. Still, he thought he ought to be true to his former promise, and tried to meet his old sweetheart with a warmth he did not feel. The struggle between duty and love

must have been a hard one, don't you think so, Florence? Well, Aunt Phyllis saw it all, and released him. She had the happiness of knowing that her old sweetheart's father had learnt to love her, and as much desired the union of herself and his son as once he had opposed it. You will remember, dear, how I came up from Glen Avon when sent for, and how I went back there with Ralph—too late, for his father was dead; but he had left his wishes behind him in a letter. Would you like to see it, Florence? You will find therein that if I married Ralph as he desired, half the property was to be my very own, and he enclosed me his last will and testament to that effect."

My sister's interest was fully excited now. She was sitting up and gazing straight into my aunt's face.

"There was a codicil to this will, dear,

to the effect that if Ralph did not fulfil his contract with me and marry me within one year after his father's death, *everything should be mine.*"

"Then this place is your's," cried Florence, "*not* our's—not Ralph's, I mean."

"It would have been had I wished for it; as it was I thought the will an unjust one, therefore I have not acted upon it."

"Aunt Phyllis! let me read it;" and she stretched forth a trembling hand for it. When she had mastered its contents she asked pitifully, "Why, why did you not marry Ralph?"

"Because he loved another; because I would not let him perjure himself either for my sake or for his well-loved acres. Child, child, for what have you made him and yourself miserable? who put this foolish fancy into your head?"

"Your own letters. I had his keys one

day. I know it was not right, auntie; but I opened his desk, and there I found a packet of your letters."

"And you read them?"

"Yes, and it brought its own punishment. Oh! Aunt Phyllis, what loving letters they were. Whenever he spoke to me I seemed to hear your words of love, and I never knew any peace after. Auntie, auntie, I do love him so, and yet when I think it is *you* he loves after all, and not me, I believe I hate him."

"Florence, these feelings are unworthy of you," said Aunt Phyllis, sternly—more sternly than I had ever heard her speak before.

"Why, why did you both deceive me?" asked my sister; "why have I been treated like a child?"

"Just to save you from the very thing which has happened. We feared you might

be jealous of a shadow that had passed, and it seems we were right; and now, my dear niece, shall I stay with you or go back to Heathley?"

There was a great quivering of the white eyelids, and tears were rolling slowly down the pale face—pale save for those hectic spots; then she looked up suddenly.

"Aunt Phyllis, if I die you will make him happy—you will marry him."

Another pause; then Aunt Phyllis's voice, clear and somewhat hard, as though it was a great effort to her to speak.

"No, Florence! I would not marry Ralph if he were free to-morrow, and if he asked me a hundred times; moreover, I have made up my mind to *marry someone else!*"

I could not sit still; it was more than anyone could expect, and I started forward, while my sister's voice and mine rang out together in the same words.

"Oh! Aunt Phyllis!" and then we added, "Whom?"

"I had an offer this morning from an old lover of your's, Florence—Mr. Radcliffe."

"And you mean to accept it?"

"Yes! he is a good man, and I think my sphere of usefulness will be larger as a clergyman's wife. I shall tell him of my former engagement, and if he still wishes it, I shall marry him."

"It is very odd that we should have exchanged lovers, auntie," said my sister, with an actual smile (it was very evident that a heavy weight had been lifted off her mind); "but what about that will? Ralph did not marry you, so the property should be your's, and if he knew of its existence, he could not retain it."

"I do not mean that he ever shall know," said Aunt Phyllis, quietly, and walking to the fire, she threw in it the will of Ralph's

father, and we saw it blaze up and fall into charred fragments.

"Aunt Phyllis! stay with me!" cried my sister, holding out both her arms to her, and falling upon her breast she sobbed there, and more affected than I cared to acknowledge, I crept away and wept too.

Foolish, foolish Florence, to wreck her life's happiness for such folly, yet I feared she had done so.

That night Aunt Phyllis and I were alone for a few moments. "Auntie," I said, "let me congratulate you; but I never was more surprised. I had no idea Mr. Radcliffe loved you, or still less that you would accept him, or anyone."

"Nor had I, dear. I only learnt this morning of Mr. Radcliffe's affection for me, and had I answered his letter then, I should have refused his offer; but when I saw that poor girl killing herself over her

jealous fancies, it decided me. If I become Mrs. Radcliffe, she knows I cannot marry Ralph in case of her death, and that will ease her mind."

"Aunt Phyllis, you are sacrificing yourself again."

"Not so, dear; I respect and esteem Mr. Radcliffe greatly, and deem myself fortunate in having so good a companion over the rough roads of life. I think I can make him happy, Miriam. Our hearts are set upon the same work, and we shall be able to help one another, and others too, I hope."

"And may you be happy yourself, auntie," I murmured, "for no one can deserve it more."

All my sister's dislike to Aunt Phyllis vanished, and during those days of sickness which followed (and, oh! what weary ones they were, full of suspense and anxiety),

she would have no one else by her. Upon one occasion she looked up, suddenly.

"Auntie, have you accepted him?" she asked.

"Have I accepted Mr. Radcliffe? Yes, dear, it is all settled."

A smile flitted over her pale face, and trembled upon her lips.

"I am so glad, auntie," she said, softly. "He will be happy after all. I did not behave well to him, and he had been so kind to us." Then, after a long pause, during which the blue eyes were gazing out of the window at the beautiful scene beneath. "How soft and dreamy it all looks, Aunt Phyllis, and what glorious tints are coming upon the trees. Autumn is Ralph's favourite season of the year. I wish he could see it now," and I saw that tears were gathering fast. "Auntie, I have not managed my life well. I was not

satisfied even with all he gave me. I did not try to make him happy after I found those letters. I have been very wicked, have I not?"

"Poor child! if you have erred, you have suffered."

"I have, indeed, auntie. Do you think he will ever forgive me? Do you think he will ever come back?"

Aunt Phyllis had the wisdom not to say that he had written to her, which knowledge might have reawakened the jealousy in her nature.

"You can pray for both, dear," she answered, smoothing the tumbled golden head, "and we know that our prayers are heard."

But although Aunt Phyllis *said* nothing more, she *did* a great deal, and that night's post carried a letter to Ralph Chilton, telling him of his wife's illness, of her regret for her conduct towards him, her wish for

his return, and of one thing more, the birth of his little son; for during the evening, a small stranger had made his appearance upon the stage of life, and Florence lay pale and beautiful with her babe in her arms.

"Aunt Phyllis, if Ralph could only see him," she whispered.

"And so he will, one day, darling, rest assured."

"Do you really think so?" asked my sister, anxiously.

"Indeed I do."

She gave a sigh of relief.

"Then I will try and get well!"

The next morning the first words which greeted me were,

"Miriam, is he not like Ralph? his eyes are just the same colour."

"I dare say they are, if we could only see them," I returned with a smile; "but

my nephew does not seem inclined to open them very wide, at present."

"You must be very stupid, I think, Miriam. I can see them well enough."

"It is with the eyes of faith then, dear. A mother's faith," I returned.

"What are you two arguing about?" asked Aunt Phyllis, brightly, as she entered the room. "Baby's eyes like his father's? Why, of course they are. I give it against you, Miriam; and, moreover, I can't allow all this talking; and there is a letter awaiting you down stairs from Miss Caroline Montague, with an unusually black border. I fear her sister must be dead."

"Oh! but, auntie, she has not been ill."

"That may be, Miriam; yet, in the midst of life we are in death, and at Miss Montague's age the thread of life is quickly snapped."

I hastened down to get my letter, and found Aunt Phyllis's fears had but too truly been realized, and Miss Caroline had written begging me to come to her, as she was now alone in the world.

I waited to consult my aunt before answering the letter, and having talked the matter over together, it was decided that Aunt Phyllis should not leave my sister for the present, but that I should go down immediately to the Manor House, and, if possible, I was to persuade my dear old friend to return with me to Heathley, where my presence, or that of Aunt Phyllis, was sorely needed, letters from Greenholm being short, unsatisfactory, and full of complaints.

I saw Mr. Radcliffe. Of course he came to see me, and I was bewildered at the change in him, the old diffidence was replaced by a grave air of happy content.

"I need not regret my former disappointment, Miss Miriam, when I have secured such a priceless treasure. Your aunt was so good to me in my transient trouble."

"She is good to every one, Mr. Radcliffe," I said, warmly; "and you are indeed a most fortunate man, and may be truly thankful that your love for my sister, beautiful as she is, came to nothing. She was far too young for you, and too thoughtless and inexperienced for a clergyman's wife."

"Yes! I can see it all now, Miss Miriam, all things have been ordered for the best, and I *am* very thankful. There is no one in the world like Miss Armatage."

Mr. Lyndhurst, too, I saw. Time had not touched him with a light hand. He was as glad as ever to meet me, but there was a look of overwork and care in his

face, which had, perhaps, been there when I had seen him before; but which had too visibly deepened now, and I could not help wishing earnestly that he, like Mr. Radcliffe, might find a good and suitable mate, instead of living his lonely, solitary, home life, and the thought kept recurring to my mind, how greatly I should like to help him to happiness.

The star of the Riders had been in the ascendant, and must indeed have moved in some eccentric orbit; for the breaking up of the company which had ruined my father, seemed but to have made Mr. Rider a richer man! and I can only say with Lord Dundreary, "There are some things which no fellar can understand."

The fact remained that the Riders had built themselves what they called a mansion, and which really was a large detached

house in a highly decorated style, the balustradings, terraces, and ornamental pots of which were supposed to class it among Italian architecture, although, probably, the Italians would neither have recognised nor owned it as such.

As far as my small experience goes, I should have termed it of the genus *mongrel;* but no doubt Mrs. Rider would say that was because I was envious of it. Em'ly has no need now to hire horses. Her papa keeps a carriage and pair, and Em'ly rides one of them, gallantly, with the coachman in handsome top boots behind her on the other. Even though some folks did say the steed was somewhat heavy for a lady's use.

Dear Miss Caroline consented to my wish that she should return with me to Heathley, and the old Manor House was for the time deserted. Six out of the seven

had passed away, and it would have been sad, indeed, for the seventh to have remained there alone.

CHAPTER XXI.

I HAVE referred little to my penmanship for a long time past; but still I had been at work diligently, and had been able to keep myself in clothes and pocket-money, though I had not found the profits of novel writing very great. Those who sit down to begin their first books little dream what an amount of patience and perseverance they will need to carry them through at all; and certainly people who read those works do not at all realize the labour which has been expended on even the worst of them, as they *skim* the pages which have

been written with so much care, for such poor remuneration. It is only a few fortunate authors who can command high prices; those who have made a name; some deservedly, some undeservedly; and after that it matters little what they write, the publishers will not refuse their works, nor their price, however poor the articles.

The question is often asked, "What's in a name?" In authorship, at any rate, *everything*. I suppose all authors have sanguine natures and expect great successes; but how few have their expectations realized.

Well, I conclude were it made easier for us, too many writers would arise; as it is publishers are obliged to have hard hearts, and authors thick skins, and we must think ourselves lucky if we manage to produce anything which at all touches the public taste, and passes muster among reviewers.

Although I believe it is a known fact that many a book which would never have been heard of, has been *whipped into fame!* Indeed, I am told upon the best authority, that a short time since, after a review in the *Times* had appeared, stating that a book *was not fit to be read by any one, five thousand copies* were immediately sold! Oh! the perversity of human nature. It makes one feel inclined, like the Irishman, to ask, "Who will tread on the tail of me coat?"

How many hours a day does the non-writer suppose an author is obliged to wield his pen? How many months does he imagine he is wading through sheet after sheet of foolscap? Does he think at all of the over-wrought brain of the poor author, his days of steady application, and his restless nights? Not he; all he knows is that some one has *written a book*, and if

he likes it he will perhaps praise it a little, and acknowledge it is "not half bad," and if he doesn't, why, he will pick up the biggest stones he can to throw at it, and if no stones are at hand—mud, perhaps, or sand. All is fair in love, or war, or criticism; and the moral of it is, I suppose, if you mind being shot at, don't put yourself up for a target!

Well! I had been mother to three novels, and each in its turn had of course met with its rough and its kindly handling; on the whole I was deemed fortunate, because so many had been far less so, but I had not found an author's path lay through a rose garden, except for the thorns to be found there.

Still I doubt if I should have liked it, had I suddenly been obliged to put aside my pen, and bid my fancies cease to flow.

My books had become my friends and

companions, and I should have been grieved had it been necessary for me to be parted from them.

Bob had gone with his regiment to India. He had been home to say good-bye to us all, and it had been a sad parting to us, although his heart seemed light. I could not help thinking of those words, "Men must work and women must weep," as we watched him off with tear-dimmed eyes. He had been down to Glen Avon to see Florence and Aunt Phyllis, who wrote that he had left them in high spirits. It was only when he bade farewell to his father and me, that he faltered in the least, and even then he was hopeful.

"I shall soon return father," he cried, cheerily, "and I will send you home some Indian shawls and Eastern jewelry, Miriam they will suit your dark style of beauty."

"*Beauty!* Bob?" I questioned, smiling

through my tears. Then he stooped and whispered, "Suppose I come across Herbert Armstrong, eh! Well, I will give you a good character old girl." A pause, pain-freighted. "Take care of the father, Miriam, and God grant that we may meet again."

One long, long kiss, and the sound of wheels, a backward look from a dear, dear face, and Bob was gone, while Sir Charteris stood gazing after him, shading his eyes from the autumn sun. And was I wrong, or were there tear-drops gathering in the lashes? In silence I clasped his cold hand, and led him in to his own cosy room, and drawing a stool to his feet I sat there unreproved.

We Costelions use few words when our feelings are touched for good or evil, for sorrow or for joy.

After awhile I returned to Glen Avon,

and let Aunt Phyllis come home. Mr. Radcliffe was waiting to pay her a visit; and her especial care—her poor—were clamorous to get her back among them.

The grandmothers and their knittings were very much inclined to get bewildered, and Aunt Phyllis seemed to be the only one who could set them to rights, and pick up their stitches to their satisfaction.

It was Christmas-tide once more. The world lay pure and white around us. Jack Frost sparkled upon each tree, bough and bush, icicles hung like crystals from the eaves, and the window panes were covered with strange traceries, while the yule logs roared and hissed up the chimneys, and the fires burned bright from the frost.

I was doing my best to cheer my sister, but my own thoughts turned longingly towards Greenholm. I should like to be

with my father and Aunt Phyllis (I told myself) at this season, but I could not leave Florence. And as if in answer to my wish two letters were brought in, one for my sister and one for me, both containing the same request, that we would be at Heathley on Christmas Eve; and a little line at the end of mine marked *private* more than ever made me anxious to go.

I had some difficulty in persuading my sister to leave her home, "Suppose he comes while I am away," she urged; but I confidently tell her that he will not come, and carry her away with me by my very eagerness, until having caught the infection she is eager too.

We are greeted with a loving welcome by Aunt Phyllis on our arrival.

"It is to be a happy family gathering," she tells me. Mr. Radcliffe had for once obtained the services of a *locum tenens*, and

she had asked our old friend Mr. Lyndhurst also.

"I wish he would marry Miss Caroline," I said, laughing. "I know no one else worthy of him."

"Poor Miss Montague; it will cheer her to see you; you cannot think how fond she is of you, Miriam—of you and of Herbert Armstrong."

"Good, dear old soul, I am sure we both return or, rather, reciprocate her affection, dear auntie; and now tell me about yourself, when are you going to make Mr. Radcliffe really happy?"

"We talk of this time next year," she replied, with a faint flush on her pale cheek.

"Auntie, how fond you are of putting things off," I laughed, "but I cannot imagine what we shall all do without you; are we to stay on here pauperizing poor grand-

mamma? and, oh! Greenholm will never be Greenholm without you, auntie, dear."

"So I have been telling myself," she returned, smiling, "and I do not think I can leave it after all."

"Not leave it?" I exclaimed, in wonder, "why, auntie, it is impossible that you can mean to disappoint Mr. Radcliffe."

"I hope he will not be disappointed dear, but I do not think I shall ever go to Little Newington."

I could only gaze at her in blank amazement. Could Aunt Phyllis really mean that she was going to jilt the unfortunate man? and I was left in wonder, for a ring came at the bell, and Aunt Phyllis left me without a single word of explanation. I felt bewildered somewhat, and altogether uncomfortable. My belief in Aunt Phyllis was unbounded, but when a person's own lips declare a thing, one can hardly help

believing it; and she had distinctly told me she doubted if she should ever go to Little Newington, and Aunt Phyllis was not a woman to tell an untruth. What was I to believe? had she only said she would marry Mr. Radcliffe to still my sister's jealous fears; and if so was such a line of conduct fair towards him? For he had evidently believed in her promise.

To doubt Aunt Phyllis's integrity seemed to be rank heresy, and I jumped up from my chair, pushed my way through the closed curtains and stood by the French windows looking out upon the snow-clad garden, sadly and wonderingly. The door opened, and some one entered, but I never looked to see who it was, my bewildered mind was still puzzling out the enigma of Aunt Phyllis's words. "She did not think she should ever go to Little Newington." Was that unfortunate man again going to be

disappointed? A second time the door opened behind me, then a voice recalled me to myself.

"My wife! I have come back; have you a welcome for me?"

A glad cry in answer, and I knew that my sister was sobbing in her husband's arms; so I quietly unfastened the French window and slipped out into the night alone, leaving those two behind reconciled. Not even to pass through the room would I intrude upon their Christmas joy.

Aunt Phyllis was standing in the lighted dining-room, seeing that nothing had been forgotten, as every good housekeeper must do; and I tapped upon the window pane and asked her to let me in. Then I told her that her words had troubled me, and begged her to come with me for one of the olden time chats in her little sanctum.

"Auntie." I whispered, when the door

was shut, "Do you know Ralph has come home?"

"Yes, Miriam, and I am very thankful. He has been in England some days, but I did not find it as easy as I expected to make him forgive; however, I thank God all is well now. It has been such a weight on my mind dear, for I felt myself responsible for their happiness."

"And now, auntie, do you not feel responsible for Mr. Radcliffe's also?" I asked.

"Undoubtedly dear, that goes without telling; you forget that our interests are now identical."

"That is my own Aunt Phyllis," I cried, joyously, "but how could you say that you did not think you would ever go to Little Newington?"

"So, Miriam, your faith failed you! Well, child, I would have trusted *you* with clearer evidence against you. Nevertheless,

I will tell you a secret. I have a present to give my future husband to-morrow. Can you guess what it is, Miriam?"

"A sermon case of your own making?"

"Nothing that has cost me half so much trouble," she laughed. Then her face grew serious.

"Miriam, I do not think I *could* leave Heathley, I have lived here all my life; every leaf and tree and flower in this dear old garden is precious to me, not less so the old home where we were all born and reared; and up there," looking in the direction where the church stood enshrouded in darkness, "lie our beloved dead. No! I could not leave Greenholm, dear."

"Then is Mr. Radcliffe coming to live here?" I asked, in wonder.

"Yes, Miriam, I hope so. My gift is the advowson of this living, which the present vicar was anxious to dispose of, so that I

need not be parted from any of you; and indeed, I do not think I could have left my mother, and she, on the other hand, could never have deserted her old home. Things have been very mercifully ordered, Miriam, we may truly believe that all is for the best. So now, my husband will labour among the poor whom I love so well, and I am more glad than I can tell you that it is so. But now, dear, run down and give a welcome to Ralph; his parting from you was a painful one, let your meeting be happy."

So I went and tapped at the door, and entering, wished them both happiness, as though they were newly married; and it seemed like a fresh going away when the morning after Christmas Day, Ralph handed his beautiful young wife, with a happy, hopeful face, into the waiting carriage; only there was a hostage present to speak of the

past—their baby boy; of whom, my brother-in-law was wondrous careful, lifting him into the carriage himself, and wrapping his long cloak carefully around him; and thus, for the second time, they set out on life's journey, and, as it seemed to me, with more prospect of happiness than before. Those months of anxiety and waiting had been a severe lesson to my impatient sister, and she felt how very nearly she had lost her husband. How nearly, perhaps only he and Aunt Phyllis knew. Then, regret on his part for the loss of that truer love must be laid aside, for he had been told of her engagement to Mr. Radcliffe. He had said nothing, it is true, but somehow, I verily believe he thought himself badly used; and therefore, leaned all the more on his wife's regained affection.

Florence had told him of that will which had been burnt, and before he left Green-

holm, he took my aunt by both her hands, and said, brokenly, "Phyllis, I find I owe all to you, even to the roof which is to shelter me; yet, had I known it in time, I should have wished you to have kept it."

"Then you would have wished something very wrong, Ralph. You have your boy to come after you, and the old name and the old acres must never be parted. Florence should not have betrayed my secret. Now, good bye; see, she is waiting for you; mind, you must not make her jealous again, Ralph. Good bye, and God bless you."

That had been a happy Christmas-tide for all; but, like most earthly joys, it was shadowed by sorrow—the sorrow for the dear absent ones. I felt the tears well up into my eyes as I looked towards the place at table where Bob had been wont to sit, wondering somewhat wearily when he would

take his seat there again—little dreaming—Ah! Bob, my dear, dear brother, my heart yearned for you in that family gathering where all seemed so bright; my love went out to you across the mighty ocean, and over the arid desert; over the towns and cities of other climes, over the cloud capped mountains, and the deep, silent rivers. And so soul spoke to soul, and we were united, though apart. Bob, one other, and I, that Christmas-tide.

How glad we were that my sister and her husband were reconciled. It had lifted a great weight from my mind. I had feared for her, she was so young, so thoughtless, so self-willed; so strong for good or evil, that had her husband not come back, I cannot think what would have become of her. To return to Aunt Phyllis's roof a dependent and a suppliant, would scarcely have been brooked by her proud spirit;

as it was, all was well, and we earnestly trusted it would remain so.

The look of care had passed away from Aunt Phyllis's brow, and one of peace rested there instead. She looked forward hopefully to the new path of life which was about to open for her.

"Auntie," I whispered, one day, laying my hand upon her shoulder, "I think you are happier, I believe so." And she had lifted those earnest eyes to mine so fully.

"Yes, dear, I am so glad that Ralph and Florence are re-united, and personally, I am very thankful to be permitted to go through life side by side with one so really good as Mr. Radcliffe, and I hope I shall be a help to him, little Miriam. I mean to try."

"Auntie, you will be a crown to him!" I exclaimed, warmly, "and already he looks ten years younger for his happiness."

"Poor fellow! I don't think much has come to his share so far; his life has been a hard one indeed. He has taken care of others and forgotten himself," said Aunt Phyllis.

"I believe that is quite true, auntie," I replied, "and I used to be so sorry when our naughty Flo played upon his feelings: but that is over now, and he will soon be safe in port, dear, and I am so glad." Then I kissed her, and she went away to talk to Mr. Radcliffe, and I to sit with my friend Miss Caroline.

"Miriam, dear," she said, "here are Christmas wishes for you come a day too late." And I knew from whom she meant.

"They are equally welcome, dear," I answered, and added, "How is he?" For I could not pretend that I did not know.

"He is fairly well, Miriam, but thinks

the climate is somewhat telling upon his health, and he gives me a cheering piece of news."

I lift my eyes to hers, and see that she is smiling at me, and then she answers the question they had silently asked. And I learn, that his regiment will be home the very next year, and a great wave of joy sweeps over me, and carries all other thoughts away, leaving only that one.

He was coming home; after all the weary years of absence—he was coming back. Then all the blood receded from my heart, leaving me white and trembling.

"Oh! Miss Caroline, shall I be allowed to see him?" I gasped. "If he were in England, and I could not give him one word of welcome, that would indeed be hard to bear; harder than it is now."

"Poor child," she murmured, "yet you should be happy Miriam, for *he loves you,*

but it will not be my fault if you do not meet."

"Do you think papa would permit it? Do you think he would consent to my seeing him?" I questioned, eagerly.

There was a strange look in the dear old face, as she said softly—

"'What may to-morrow bring—who can tell?' We can but do our best to persuade Sir Charteris, my dear, and we must leave the result in higher hands;" and I noticed that she was unusually thoughtful, although a smile played about her lips; a smile which I often surprised there for many days after, but which vanished when those sad tidings came to us from Afghanistan, and the news which soon followed, that both Herbert Armstrong's and my brother's regiments were ordered over the frontier upon active service. I had never cared much for newspapers, and, except reading the leading articles to

Sir Charteris, they had held no place in my daily life; but, after I had heard that two of my dearest were in that strange and treacherous land—a land already dyed by the blood of our countrymen in days gone by, then indeed, the paper became my first thought. I used to sit by the window to watch for it. With ever increasing fear my trembling fingers opened it day by day; with sickening anxiety and suspense I scanned the telegrams and more protracted accounts, looking for two names only among the throng of killed and wounded. Those alone, whose dear ones are before the enemy know how such search the death lists; or the gasp of relief which escapes from their hearts on not finding what they look for, and so dread to see.

Doubtless, the name of the battle of Maiwand is scarcely remembered by some, but by us it can never be forgotten.

Whose fault that defeat was caused by, it is not for me to say, much less to judge; but it cost me one of my dearest, my brother Bob!

Never again should we see the bright, earnest young face, never more have a smile from those true dark eyes.

The empty chair which had struck me with such sadness only the Christmas before would never again be filled by him, and there were none to say farewell to him —none to shed one tear over the new-made grave.

He had died a soldier's death, poor boy, a death which should ever be remembered.

Have you heard of that brave little band which, though all was lost, would not be conquered?

Bob was one of their number.

Let me tell you what they did, and as you sit at home beside your fire give a

thought to those who are fighting for your country's honour—think of the soldier's life, the soldier's death. Speak to your children of them, and do not forget the fate of that handful of brave men at Maiwand.

There have been "forlorn hopes" since wars first began, but surely none was ever more forlorn than this.

The army was scattered, cut up, had fled; but a remant was left—a remnant of ten. Picture the scene. They stand side by side, and hand to hand, with a host before them, behind them, around them. There is no hope, not one glimmer; but they charge—they rush on with a cheer; their enemies fall back, surprised into admiration for the men who are their foes. They are ashamed to close them in and slaughter them—actually ashamed, as a man, who is a man, would be ashamed to strike a woman, or one weaker than him-

self; but their chiefs rally them and lead them on against that little band of ten.

They know well that their hour has come, but their courage never forsakes them. Back to back they stand there, each face set and pale—ready for death. Their enemies may annihilate them, but it is a poor victory, for they cannot make them quail. There they fight, there they die. Still such pluck may be seen—for the love of the right and the love of their Queen.

But think you they do it for the miserable pittance they receive as pay?

Hardly so, when a road-maker can earn more than a subaltern officer!

Yet wherever there is risk and danger, with the hope of glory, men will go, without counting the cost. God help them! Whether they receive any thanks or no, let each judge for himself.

I have my own opinion upon the matter.

It went hard with my poor father, the loss of his eldest son; it went hard with us all. There was nothing left us but to mourn for him.

I never knew Sir Charteris so tender as he was to me at that time; perhaps it was because I, who was Bob's own sister, could enter more perfectly into his feelings.

Ah! how I used to wish that, since death had been his allotted portion, he had been lying in the dear old churchyard by the hill side, that I might have had a grave to weep by; but I knew that such wishes were vain.

My father received a kind letter from Herbert Armstrong. He had seen my brother that very morning before they had gone into action, and thought he would like to hear all that had passed between them then. He also gave a detailed account

of that fatal fight. He had himself been wounded early in the day, and had been carried off the battlefield—a fact which had doubtless saved his life.

I think my father was touched at Herbert's having written to him in his trouble, for he handed me the letter in silence which was more eloquent than words, and in silence I returned it.

Ah! how glad I felt that one friend at least had been there that morning to clasp his hand! Yes, probably my Herbert's had been the last which had touched his, here in life.

Ah, well! In the large continental churches every day may be seen marriages and funerals going on at the same time; and so it is with our lives.

Aunt Phyllis was anxious to put off her wedding, but we would not hear of it. She had indeed waited long enough for happi-

ness, and now we could but hope it would come to her.

She was not superstitious abcut black garments at her marriage, and her own were grey; a quiet, sad-faced, sweet-featured bride was dear Aunt Phyllis.

Bob was her own sister's son, and she grieved for him sorely. Grandmamma Costelion was sorry too, in her own cold way, but I am sure she believed in her own mind that it had been retributive justice for having taken up such an evil practice as smoking—a judgment, in fact!

Oh! my dear, dear Bob, my darling brother! smoke proved your winding-sheet, the smoke of the rifle and the cannon, and their hiss and roar your dirge.

Our recent bereavement was reason enough for having the quietest of quiet weddings. Not even my sister and her

husband were invited; and surely it was better so—best for us all.

Aunt Phyllis's own carriage conveyed her to the church, accompanied by Sir Charteris, Grandmamma Armatage, and myself. No one else was present, for no one had been told that the event was to take place. The old vicar had come over to perform the ceremony, and my father gave the bride away, after which we all partook of the Holy Communion. It was a quiet and peaceful service, and to my mind was better altogether than those gay scenes where the noise and crowd preclude all reverence. Then the carriage took Mr. and Mrs. Radcliffe home, and we walked back across the fields, and after an unpretending breakfast the bride and bridegroom started on their travels. They had arranged no fixed route, but intended taking a month's holiday, and then returning to their joint duties at Heathley.

I felt that now my dear aunt was married we ought no longer to cumber her home; but she would not hear of our going away, and indeed where could we go?

At length we decided on paying a visit to Florence and Ralph, and then one to Miss Caroline Montague, so that the newly-married pair should shake into their position untrammelled; but their requests for our return were so urgent, and Heathley seemed so much like home to us, that we went back most joyfully.

We had found my sister looking well and happy, and at last contented, and after six weeks' sojourn under her roof we left, with the full certainty that she really was so.

I thought I sometimes saw a wistful look upon Ralph's face when we spoke of Aunt Phyllis and her husband; but no one else seemed to notice it, not even his wife, so I

will not accuse him of being a dog in the manger.

Miss Caroline was just the same dear, kind Miss Caroline as ever, only more feeble. She was one of those people whose friendship never wavers, never varies—one in whom you may trust implicitly. Being under the same roof with my father, he grew to like and admire her scarcely less than I did myself, and I could see plainly that he was influenced by her opinions, even though he did not acknowledge the fact.

More than once I surprised them talking of Herbert, and though their converse ceased at my entrance, I could not help thinking that to get Sir Charteris to speak of him at all was a point gained.

And then we went home to Greenholm. Sir Charteris had not been moved from his cozy study; another had been found

upstairs for Mr. Radcliffe, and both were content.

It was indeed a kind welcome which dear Aunt Phyllis gave us. She said her home had not been homelike without us, and I know she meant it.

Sir Charteris was all the happier for having a companion, of his own sex too, and many were the political discussions which he and Mr. Radcliffe held.

My father was of course a Tory, while the vicar, although a Conservative, was a very liberal one indeed.

"Every man has a right to his own opinion," he maintained.

"I cannot agree with you," returned Sir Charteris, "and you as a clergyman should uphold authority. Things are bad enough already, reverence and obedience seem to be things of the past, and the age of insubordination to have set in. It is quite suffi-

cient reason now to be insulted that you are a gentleman."

"There is too much truth in what you say," answered Mr. Radcliffe, sadly, "and I do not see the remedy when men like Bradlaugh are elected to represent the people, a man avowedly without religion."

"Do not name him to me," cried Sir Charteris. "Why, if the combined boroughs of Sodom and Gomorrah had returned a member, they could not have elected a worse man."

"That is strong condemnation, Sir Charteris," cried the vicar, with an amused smile, which, however, quickly faded as he continued, "It never does to pull the string too tightly, so I maintain that men should be allowed their own opinions, but we should try and influence them."

"Influence! nonsense! The '*fortiter in re*' is the only sort of treatment they

understand; smooth words and arguments to them merely signify want of power."

"I fear it is the spirit of Antichrist which we see around us, a spirit which we are warned against in the Bible. People forget that in rendering obedience to those set over them here they are honouring God."

"You look at the matter from a religious point of view, I from a political one. What is to become of England, with the party spirit now existent, should worse wars come upon us? As it is, our national hands are full enough, and there are black clouds over Africa and Ireland even now."

"There are indeed; but Englishmen, whatever their politics, will, I am sure, come to the rescue whenever the country's honour shall be threatened; although they may not even know it themselves, there must be patriotism as there must be religion in every heart."

"But *is* there religion in every heart?" questioned Sir Charteris. "One would scarcely believe it if you cast your eye daily down the police reports."

"James Martineau tells us that 'Religion is born as thought begins,' that it is *re*born 'when thought is consummated and enters into its glory.' The mind, like the Garden of Eden, was made beautiful, and it is by the sin of man that the weeds and briars have sprung up and changed it to a wilderness."

"The next question which arises is what you mean by religion?" said my father, sententiously. "Now, you as a clergyman would probably hold narrower views upon that point than I do. A piece I read in one of Victor Hugo's books a few days since struck me. He says: 'How many men have thought that they were praying to Jupiter, while they were praying to

Jehovah! How many believers in amulets have been heard by the Infinite! How many Atheists fail to perceive that, by the sole fact of being good and sorrowful, they are praying to God!"

"So that, after all, you think there *is* a chance for Bradlaugh," returned the vicar, smiling. "Well, it is of no use for us to speculate from what remote quarters God may see fit to collect the jewels for His crown, Sir Charteris. All we know is, that each stone according to its nature must be real and good. There is no religion in which truth cannot be found, and I fear none in which there is not error."

CHAPTER XXII.

"AUNT PHYLLIS," I said, suddenly, looking up at her one day, "you made me a promise years ago, and you have never fulfilled it, but I want you to do so now. Do you remember, almost when first I knew you, repeating a verse to me which you told me had been sent to you by a friend one Christmas-tide? Well, you promised to tell me that friend's history, and I should like to hear it."

"What makes you remember it after all this while, Miriam?" asked my aunt.

"I can hardly tell, but it is not the first

time it has occurred to my memory by many, although I have never asked about it."

"It is not much of a story, dear, but only the record of a young girl's folly :—

"I had a schoolfellow. She was a pretty, wilful, blue-eyed girl—not unlike Florence, both in disposition and appearance, although, to my mind, she was less beautiful. Her faults were very plainly visible, but somehow I was fond of her—indeed, there was something sunny in her nature which invited love, and most people took to her at first, even if they gave her up in despair afterwards. She was undoubtedly a great flirt, and got herself into constant scrapes in consequence; but I always felt that there was much excuse to be made for her, from the fact of her having been brought up without the influence of her parents, who were in India.

"When her schooldays were over she was to live in the house of an elderly gentleman of good family, who resided in a fine old place in Herefordshire, whose name was Leigh, he being her father's greatest friend. I hardly think it was an advisable arrangement, for Mr. Leigh was a bachelor, and moreover had a nephew living with him, who was his presumptive heir.

"This nephew was not, however, at home when my friend first went into Herefordshire, and by the time he returned—from college I believe—she was quite a pet with the old man, and it was not long before she was beloved by the young one.

"He was very good and gentle to her, and she grew fond of him in return, and behaved fairly well until they became engaged, when the spirit of mischief peeped out and she commenced to torment her lover.

"He bore it passively at first, but after a time, not only were her caprices well-nigh unbearable, but she took to flirting in order to make him jealous, and well she succeeded.

"All this I have learnt from her own lips, for I never knew the young man himself. She must have made him suffer very greatly, I fear, for the engagement was broken off, and he returned to college.

"His uncle was from home and knew nothing of the circumstances of the case but what she told him when he came back, and I fear she did not act as she should have done.

"She only was to blame, as she well knows; but she did not acknowledge this fact to Mr. Leigh, who was furious with his nephew, and wrote him an intemperate letter, in which he enclosed a cheque, telling him it was the last money he would

ever receive from him; moreover, he added something in which he was not justified, namely, that he intended to marry Laura himself."

"And did he?" I asked, as she paused, just as I had asked that same question of my friend, Mr. Lyndhurst, when he had told me the tale of his blighted life; and as I thought of him, it struck me suddenly how similar these two stories were, told from different points of view, and I grew even more interested. Laura! why it was the very name of the girl he had loved.

"No, she would not marry him. When it was too late she found out the truth, that there was only one man in the world she ever could love, and that she had lost him."

"Would he not forgive her?" I asked.

"She has never heard of him from that day to this, so she could not ask him."

"And Mr. Leigh?"

"Oh, he was very angry at first, but he forgave her before his death, and left her the old place which should have been his nephew's; but it is shut up, she will not live there. Her parents died in India, and a small fortune came to her from them. On that she lives in a cottage on the estate, so that she may see it does not go to rack and ruin; but not one penny of the money will she touch, for she says she has no moral right to it, and I must confess I agree with her; and if ever he returns he will find the money accumulated into a very large sum. Poor Laura Kilburn! her life is a sad and solitary one. She never leaves Herefordshire in case her old lover may return."

"Auntie," I said, with emotion, "what is his name?"

"She would never tell me, Miriam, so I don't know."

"Aunt Phyllis," I cried, excitedly, "tell me what sort of a woman this Laura Kilburn *is now?*"

"She has been refined in sorrow's furnace, dear, and is now true metal."

"Would she welcome him? would she be worthy of him if he came back?"

"I think I may say yes to both those questions, Miriam."

"Then they shall be reconciled. Oh! auntie, I am so glad. He has looked so miserable all these years, that is ever since I have known him."

"Who *are* you talking about, Miriam? *He? You* have known him; what can you mean?"

"Yes, auntie, and what's more, *you* know him too."

"My dear, what nonsense you are talking! I shall have to edit you," said she, smiling. "How can you or I know Laura

Kilburn's lover, when he left England at that time, and has never been heard of since."

"Nevertheless, he has been in this very house," I cried, joyfully. "Now, auntie, guess who it is! What! give it up already? Why you have no perseverance. Well, what do you think of its being Mr. Lyndhurst? He told me *his* version of the story years since."

"Mr. Lyndhurst! is it possible? Surely not; if the truth must be told, Miriam, I thought he cared for someone else."

"We are the best of friends, auntie, that is all," I replied, blushing.

"Oh! who mentioned *you* in the case, my dear child?" laughed my aunt, "'*Qui s'excuse s'accuse,*' don't you know?"

"Aunt Phyllis, please be serious: here are two people who really love each other, though parted from an unfortunate mis-

understanding; surely it is our duty to try and bring them together again."

"You are a good girl, Miriam," said my aunt, kindly. "We will do our best for our respective friends."

"But, auntie, *you* like Mr. Lyndhurst too."

"Yes! undoubtedly; I think him a true man."

"He has a large share of pride, auntie—right and proper pride, I mean. I am sure he would not take the property from Miss Kilburn. It was left her by his uncle, and he will deem it her's, nor do I believe he would marry her if he knew she possessed it. I think we must make her play a part. Let him meet her here; he never need know the truth until they are re-engaged or even married; then she can take him home, and there can be no question as to which of them the house belongs."

"Quite like the *dénouement* of a novel, Miriam," laughed my aunt; "but I believe you are right. Will you promise to produce the gentleman for this drama in real life if I secure the lady?"

"Yes I will undertake my part," I replied.

"I fancy yours will be easier than mine," said my aunt, thoughtfully. "I do not believe I shall be able to get her away from home unless I tell her the reason why."

"Well, then, do so."

"And she must remain here till they are married."

"Auntie, how good you are; your house is a refuge for the destitute."

"The more the merrier," she replied, "and I shall be right glad to see poor Laura happy."

"And I, to know Mr. Lyndhurst is so.

Auntie, it has made me quite sad often to think of him in his solitary home; and he has grown to look so careworn of late."

"What would your lover say to your interest in this young doctor, Miriam?" asked my aunt, smoothing my hair with a gentle hand.

"He is not very young, auntie," I laughed, "and if you knew Herbert you would not ask. He would not love me unless he could trust me too."

She stooped and kissed me.

"That is right, darling; always have such faith in one another; it will keep your love fresh and green."

Aunt Phyllis lost no time in talking the matter over with her husband, and it was settled that she should run down and break the good news to her friend, for good news wants breaking as well as bad sometimes; and before many days were over she

returned, bringing a stranger with her. It was Laura Kilburn. She was still a handsome woman, and there yet remained that nameless fascination about her of which Mr. Lyndhurst had spoken. I wrote to him and asked him to come and see me at once—stating no reason—and my letter brought him quickly, as I expected it would do.

"Miss Miriam, I am relieved to find *you* well at any rate, he said, cordially; "I trust however *none* of your home party require my services officially."

"It is I who need you, my friend," I said, quietly. "Please take a chair, and let us have a talk; indeed, I want you to listen to a little story which I wish you to hear"

"If I can help you in any way, you know you have only to command me," he returned.

"I believe it, Mr. Lyndhurst. Well, to

begin at once, do you remember a long while ago telling me the story of the disappointment of your life? I see you do; do not trouble to answer; and having suffered yourself you will, I feel sure, be willing to try and help another who has suffered too, although not quite so blamelessly. This person, however, is a woman. I will tell my tale in the good old fashion, Mr. Lyndhurst. There was once a young girl who had been born and reared in early childhood in India, and who, like many others, had been sent home to school in England before her character was at all formed. There she learned, and there she grew to womanhood. She was a very sweet-looking girl, and perhaps for that very reason, or perhaps because she had known so little of a mother's tender guidance, she was somewhat vain and foolish, as girls will be. When she left school she

went to live with an old friend of her father's"——Mr. Lyndhurst here started, and fixed his earnest eyes upon my face. "That old friend had a nephew who grew to love this girl"——

"Miriam," he cried, "why repeat to me that old tale? Do I not know it all but too well?"

"You promised to hear me out," I said, simply. "There is such a thing as a story told in two voices; let me continue." He made a gesture of assent, and I went on. "The uncle desired a marriage between these two, and loving each other both were glad."

"She never loved me," he broke in passionately. But I stopped him with a wave of my hand.

"They became engaged, and to show her power over him she teazed and tormented him until that engagement was broken off.

The uncle was very angry, and wrote to his nephew, sending him money, and at the same time telling him that from henceforward they must be strangers."

"He informed me he intended to marry the girl who was to have been my wife," he muttered through his clenched teeth.

"I know it. Well, you went away."

"And he married her!" burst from him, bitterly.

"Who told you so, Mr. Lyndhurst?" I asked in a quiet, firm voice.

"Told me!" he echoed; then stopped short, and looked at me with a pale set face. "I did not need much more telling after the receipt of that letter."

"But did you ever ascertain, Mr. Lyndhurst, that your uncle was *justified* in writing what he did? Do you not think that many a girl who loves a man truly has quarrelled with him and said many

things which she afterwards bitterly regrets?"

He grasped my wrist convulsively. "For God's sake tell me the truth."

"I will; Laura Kilburn has *never* married, because there was but one man in the world she could love and that man was yourself." A glad cry escaped him; but I proceeded. "Your uncle was very angry with her, but he forgave you both at the last. Your old love has lost both her parents, so that she is now alone in the world, and has been living in a little cottage of her own upon the small income left her by her father."

"I should have fancied my uncle would have bequeathed her the whole of his estate," he said, thoughtfully; "but I am glad he did not; that would have prevented my ever seeking her again. No one shall accuse me of regaining the old acres so.

Do you know to whom he left them, Miss Miriam?"

"That is of course rather a painful subject to Miss Kilburn, Mr. Lyndhurst. Let me warn you not to name it to her; it would pain her, I am sure. She is such a sweet woman, that I cannot doubt there is much happiness in store for you."

"You speak as if you knew her, Miriam."

"And so I do," I replied; and as I spoke the door opened, and Laura Kilburn stood within the room.

She was not aware of the arrival of her old lover, but she knew him.

For one moment they gazed at each other, then he called her by her name. "Laura!" I saw her advance towards him with outstretched hands, and I was satisfied to know no more.

"Aunt Phyllis," I cried, as I ran into

her little sanctum. "Aunt Phyllis! they have met, and all is well."

"I am very glad, little Miriam, and you must be very glad too, for they owe their happiness to you. Fancy your finding out Laura Kilburn's long-lost lover in your family doctor; it is quite a romance. And now we only want some good fairy to wave her golden wand over your poor little head. It is not fair that we should all be in the sunshine, while you are out in the cold."

"I am content to be in the shadows, if only the sunlight rest brightly on thee," I sang merrily, for I was glad that day in the joy of others.

* * * * *

Of Trevelyan I have of late said nothing, simply because I had seen nothing, and had heard little of him.

Aunt Phyllis had been told of a college at Heidelberg, where the education was

both good and moderate, and the lad having shown a great aptitude for languages, she and Sir Charteris thought it the best thing that could be done with him to send him there. We received from the masters good accounts of him, but I must confess that his letters were few and far between, and when they did arrive there was not much in them. They were different indeed from the chatty amusing epistles which my dear lost Bob used to send me; but then, perhaps, he felt that I was only his half-sister; and when he was at home, even as a child, I do not think that Trevelyan cared very much for either Florence or me. Now, however, the time was drawing near for his return, though he had not informed us when to expect him.

One day I was walking down the street when a cab passed, and a gentleman inside nodded to me familiarly, but as I did not

know him I walked on and took no notice. This seemed to amuse him, and pulling the check-string he jumped out. He was a tall young man about twenty years of age, with a fair moustache, and coming up with mock politeness he took off his hat—"Miss Costelion!" he exclaimed, superciliously.

I was turning away indignantly, thinking this some unheard of piece of impertinence, when the young fellow burst into a merry laugh.

"I am awfully glad to find you so prudent, Miriam; what, don't you know me? well, I *have* put on a few inches certainly, and grown a fringe on my upper lip, but family instinct and all that sort of thing, should have put you on the scent at once."

"Oh! Tre," I cried, "how altered you are! who could ever have expected you to come back such a man?"

"What did you expect me to turn into? a woman?"

"I see you are just as great a tease as ever," I laughed, "but I am right down glad to see you," and I gave him a kiss there and then, in the middle of the street.

"Take care, Miriam, take care, there's not the faintest trace of family likeness between us; you will not have a shred of reputation left, if you do this sort of thing. Jump in, we may as well go home together. What a brick Aunt Phyllis is! and what on earth should we have done without her?"

"She has indeed been good to us. Well, she will not lose her reward."

"You remind me of a story I heard the the other day," laughed my brother. "Some one was talking goody-goody to a very independent, obstinate old woman, and telling her about Heaven. 'I have no fears of

not going there,' she said, decidedly. 'I have never done anything wrong in my life. I was a good daughter to my father and mother, and Widow Giles never had a kinder friend than me; so when I get to the gate I shall just *mention their names*, that will be quite passport enough, I'll warrant. Oh! there's no fear about *my* getting admittance;' and, I am sure if Aunt Phyllis *mentions our names*, St. Peter himself will escort her in."

"I think your old woman must have been a very wicked old creature, Tre," I said.

"Oh! yes, that's of course; but it is a capital story nevertheless. And here we are at Greenholm. By the by, you have an addition to the family since I left. What sort of an uncle does old Radcliffe make? I say, Miriam, do you remember the knees of his trousers that day, and Flo saying

they were made at Kino's? the trousers, you know, not the knees—but that was really a libel on Kino, for I had some made there myself, and they were worthy of Poole; fitted awfully well. It is quite a case of 'what's in a name?' If a man professes to be a cheap jack, no one believes in his bargains, however good they may really be. Now let's surprise Aunt Phyllis. I wonder if she will know me!" And thus rattling on, unaltered as to his high spirits, he entered the house.

"Auntie, I have brought a gentleman home to see you!"

For a moment, I believe she thought it was Herbert, then, no doubt it struck her he was too young; and after regarding him attentively, she ran up and kissed him.

"Why, how you have grown, Trevelyan!" she exclaimed, "I really don't know how we shall make room for a great fellow like

you. I had had your own bed prepared for you, but you have grown out of it."

"Never mind, auntie, I can put a chair at the bottom to lengthen it. We are used to short beds in Germany, and have a feather bed over us instead of blankets, and they are not fond of washing over there, I can tell you; you should see the things they give you to tub in, not much larger than tea cups, or slop basins at best. And how well you are looking, you dear old auntie; matrimony seems to have made you ten years younger. Now, if you were not my aunt, I believe I should get awful spoons on you, auntie, you are such a sweet, dear little woman—but how's the vicar?"

"He is very well, dear, and is looking forward to finding great progress in his old pupil."

"I expect he is as jolly as a sandboy. He

has fallen on his legs, auntie, that's my opinion."

"Let me hear about yourself, Tre," said Aunt Phyllis, quietly, and it was evident to me, at any rate, that she did not like my brother's personal remarks, and I think he saw it too, for he said hurriedly, "and now I think I had better pay my respects to the governor."

"Yes, but don't *call* him so," I laughed, "for he would not like it at all; remember he has not been accustomed to your wild colt ways lately."

"I'll recollect." And he dashed off at full speed.

"He is quite a boy still, except in stature," remarked my aunt, looking after him kindly. "He has grown a handsome young fellow."

"Yes, but it is not such a face as Bob's; he was so earnest, one felt one might trust

him so fully; there was such a reliable look in his dear, dark eyes. Dear, dear Bob! Oh! how I wish we had him back."

"You must not say that, Miriam dear, must not think it; you would not wish him less happy I am sure. Think of him at rest, with the work of perfection ever going on, as the buried grain ripens unseen; just waiting for us all to join him, and for his Lord's coming."

"I am selfish, auntie, I was thinking of myself."

"Think of him instead then, dear, and your sorrow will be lighter to bear." And I promised that I would try.

Sir Charteris was pleased to see his son back, now, alas! his only son.

Grandmamma Costelion kept a somewhat severe eye upon him; she was evidently reading him, and from the expression of her face I feared her summing up was not particu-

larly favourable; indeed, his *nonchalant*, somewhat noisy manners made his father look grave too, occasionally. I know that both were thinking that he was most unlike a Costelion. But the evening passed off very well, and Aunt Phyllis, Grandmamma Armatage, and Mr. Radcliffe, all seemed pleased and amused by him, the fatal effects of unpatrician blood, I suppose; as for myself, mine being mixed, he entertained me, yet grated on my feelings sometimes. His future plans were talked of freely. He still had an inclination for the bar, and it was settled that chambers at the Temple should be taken for him forthwith.

"Good night," he cried, as, having seen that he had everything he needed in his little bedroom, I was going away to my own. "Good night, old girl, God bless you; the devil miss you; say your prayers!" What a benediction!

"Trevelyan, what a wild boy you are!" I said, stooping to kiss him.

"Boy indeed! I like you, Miriam."

"I am glad of that, Tre, and I like you too; but oh! dear, have you thought of poor Bob on this day of home coming? I don't like him to be forgotten, Tre, for he is ever present with us now remember, in spirit."

"There! you have spoilt my night's rest," he cried crossly. "What things you women are, full of morbid fancies. You did not love poor old Bob better than I did, but he is gone, poor old chap, and what is the use of talking of it."

Tears were in my eyes as I kissed him, and they fell upon his face.

"Come now, Miram, I don't want a shower bath," he cried; "we're not used to much water in Germany."

Morbid fancies! Were they so? I think

not. But when I reached my room, I drew up my blind and sat gazing on the star-lit heavens, thinking of Bob.

Was either of those bright glittering worlds his home, or to be his home hereafter? Who could tell?

I felt that his presence was very near, and those beautiful words of Monsell's came to me and gave me comfort;—

"In the lone walk, by the bright hearth of home,
In the world's pathways, mid the hush of prayer,
Where mine eyes wander, where my footsteps roam,
He is beside me, with me, everywhere.

In the old haunts where we so often stray'd,
Down by the river, up the woodland lawn,
In the deep tender gloom of evening's shade,
In the bright bursting break of morning's dawn.

Whenever pleasant sight, or gentle sound,
Lightens the eye, or lingers on the ear,
I see his form, the music floats around,
Of his sweet voice—I hear it everywhere."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"MIRIAM, what is the matter?" asked Aunt Phyllis, kindly, upon entering the room next day. "Have you bad news?"

I was sitting there, with an open letter upon my lap, my hands clasped, and my eyes full of thankful tears.

"No, auntie; good, good news, thank God! My darling Herbert has been promoted to the rank of major by death vacancies, and has received his brevet lieutenant-colonelcy for his services, and is actually on his way home. Only think of that, auntie! And if you can manage to take

her in, Miss Caroline has proposed herself for a little visit. She has heard from Herbert; and, oh! auntie, dear, he still wants me for his wife; and I am so, so happy! If only my father will consent, oh! if only he will! We have loved each other so long. I know that is why Miss Caroline is coming, dear kind creature, she is going to try and persuade him. Do you think there is any chance of her succeeding?" I asked, anxiously, and there was a happy, mischievous look in my aunt's eyes, as she replied, holding my hand in hers.

"I congratulate you, little Miriam, on your lover's success in his profession, and on his safe return home. Something tells me you will be a happy woman, after all, child."

"Do you really think so?"

"Well, Miriam, it all depends on Miss Caroline's influence over your father."

"Is not that a forlorn hope?"

"We cannot tell what arguments she will use, you see; we know, however, that she will do her best, and we must leave the issue in higher hands."

"And will you write her a line to say she may come, auntie. Can you manage for her?"

"Greenholm is very elastic, dear. We shall be able to make her comfortable, no doubt."

"Auntie, how good you are!"

"Miriam, how often have you said that?"

And she kissed me, and then bade me run away, while she wrote her letters.

Miss Caroline arrived. The very next day she spent the whole morning in my father's study, and came out with so happy a face that my heart cried that all must be well, and when I next saw Sir Charteris,

there was such a look of happiness and contentment upon his face that I could only wonder. Aunt Phyllis, too, seemed to share in their satisfaction; but, although, I was dying to know what had transpired, I felt I could not ask, and not one word of information did either of the three vouchsafe me.

Another thing I noticed, too, that Miss Caroline had letters which she actually *hid* from me. What could it all mean? Had their faces not been so serene, I should have thought that my father had again rejected my Herbert; but I felt that, loving me as they did, they could not look so happy over my misfortune. Ah! how I wondered all that day, how my heart fluttered at every sound, yet I scarce knew why.

How the pendulum of hope and fear oscillated, and the day closed in without

one word, with nothing to mark it from others, but their happy faces, and those hidden letters; and, in the evening, a telegram for Miss Caroline!

After breakfast, the next morning, Aunt Phyllis asked me to go with her to visit some poor people, and we started off with two well filled baskets, and did not get back till after noon.

When we arrived the servant who admitted us informed me that Sir Charteris had been asking for me, and wished me to come to him in the study as soon as I had taken my things off.

What was he going to say to me? Was it anything about Herbert, or was it only to ask me to read to him?

I did not take long removing my hat, &c., there was a bright glow upon my cheeks, brought there by the fresh spring air, and added to by excitement—I noticed

it as I stood before the glass to smooth my hair. Then I ran down and knocked at the study door.

In a moment Sir Charteris bade me enter, and in another, my hand was clasped in a warm, firm grasp. Two loving, tender, true blue eyes were looking into mine from a bronzed and bearded face, and I knew that my lover was faithful.

My father's voice seemed to come to me from a long, long way off, yet I heard his every word.

"Miriam, my dear, Colonel Armstrong has asked me for your hand, and I have consented to the engagement."

Ocean waves seemed to roar around my head, and close me in, just as they had done on that first day we met, when he had saved my life; and, once again, I knew that those dear eyes were looking lovingly into mine, that two strong arms

were about me ; and I felt, too, that they would shelter me from henceforth from all such trouble as it could be in human power to shield me from.

"At last, at last, my darling," he murmured, as he took me home to his heart, and our lips sealed love's compact.

Herbert had not yet seen his parents when he came to me at Greenholm, so we sent him off the very next day.

The time for our marriage was fixed. We had waited so long already that we were to wait only one short month more. I need not say that I was happy, very happy, as happy indeed as it is possible for mortals to be. My Herbert's father and mother accepted me lovingly as a daughter, writing that it was what they had ever wished since that day when their son had brought me home to them.

As to a trousseau, and all the finery

which most girls think needful before they can marry, I did not wish for any of it, and, laughingly, I told my darling that if he would have a wife, he must expect to buy her clothes.

All I needed was a moderate stock of linen. A black satin dress, a grey carmelite, and a plain white silk for my wedding-day, and these Aunt Phyllis gave me.

That month soon passed.

May, with its bright spring flowers had set in. The bells in that dear old church upon the hill-side rang out gaily to tell of a wedding, and that wedding was ours. Herbert's and mine. It was a very quiet one, though not so quiet as Aunt Phyllis's had been.

Colonel and Mrs. Armstrong came all the way up from Devonshire to be present: Mr. and Mrs. Lyndhurst, from their Herefordshire home; Florence and her husband,

from Glen Avon. And Miss Caroline was there, besides our own home circle.

Mr. Radcliffe married us, and many of the poor were there, whose humble homes I had visited; and the school children whom I had taught came to strew my path with flowers; and there among them all appeared the white head of Colonel Markham, who came with outstretched hands to wish me well.

* * * * *

We were to have a little time together, my darling and I, and then we were to go and stay with his father and mother; therefore I thought it wondrous strange that they should not meet us at Kingsbridge station upon our arrival there; a thought which I saw reflected in my husband's face; and still more I wondered when Miss Caroline popped out from the waiting room and caught me by both my hands.

A carriage and pair was awaiting us at the station, but I saw again by my Herbert's face that it was not his father's. He made no objection, however, to accompanying the dear, kind friend who had done so much for us in overcoming the scruples of Sir Charteris.

But when the long drive was nearly over, and we found we had passed the cross road which led to Colonel Armstrong's house, we began not only to wonder, but to express our surprise.

"My dear," said Miss Caroline, softly. "I told the coachman to come this way, I thought you would like a peep at your old home."

My husband's hand sought mine in sympathy.

"I should indeed, but that it belongs to strangers," I replied, huskily, "and who knows how sadly it may be altered now."

"It is not *let* now, at any rate, my dear," returned Miss Montague, "so I fancied you would like to see it when you could."

"That was thoughtful of you, and I will go; but oh! Miss Caroline, I cannot tell you how I love the old place. Every stone of it is dear to me, and it will be a painful pleasure to me to visit it again." And the smile, mingled with emotion, upon that dear old face was sympathetic indeed.

Picture my surprise, when the carriage dashed up to the hall-door of my dear old home, to find Sir Charteris standing upon the entrance steps with outstretched hand (the sinking sun glinting upon his uncovered head, with its silver locks), the second, alas! lay useless in the black silk sling. And behind him stood Colonel and Mrs. Armstrong, Aunt Phyllis, her mother and husband, Florence and Ralph, Grandmamma Costelion, and Trevelyan.

"Welcome, my little Miriam, welcome to your own home. It is my wedding-gift to you and Herbert," cried my dear, dear old friend, Miss Caroline, excitedly. "There is only one reservation I make—that it shall be Sir Charteris's home as long as he lives."

I could not answer her by one word. A great flood of gratitude filled my mind as I threw myself into her arms.

And a cry rang up Heavenward from my heart—

"Oh Bob! dear Bob, if only you were here!"

It was a wordless cry, and was that a wordless answer? A fresh sweet breeze passed through the still evening air and quivered among the trees. Did my brother's spirit so speak to me? or was I, as Trevelyan called me, "*morbid*"?

That night when Colonel Armstrong and his wife left us I noticed how our dear old

Miss Caroline's hand lingered in his, how tears trembled in the sweet old eyes.

"It will make great confusion to have two Colonel Armstrongs in the neighbourhood," remarked Lady Costelion, dryly.

"Well, you see I am only a Lieutenant-Colonel," laughed Herbert, "and we must make the fact generally known.

And so we gaily turned to separate for the night, and when I kissed my grandmother she whispered,

"Thanks to you, child, my bones will lie with those of my ancestors."

All my father said was, "God bless you, Miriam!" and I saw that his heart was too full for words.

When we assembled next morning for breakfast Miss Caroline Montague was absent, and as soon as prayers were over I went up to her room to see if all was well with her.

All was truly well, for the pure spirit had passed away to a better land than ours.

Then there came to my mind that tender handclasp of the night before, and I knew that it was her farewell to the one love of her life.

Dear, sweet old friend!

We took her home and buried her with her brothers and sisters, so that the seven who had been so much to each other in life should not be parted in death.

And when the will was read we found that all the large property of the Montagues had been left to Herbert and me, with only one condition: we were from henceforth to be called "Armstrong Montague Costelion," that the old names might not be forgotten.

So that the difficulty as to the two colonels was not one of long duration.

My husband left the service, and as

Colonel Costelion took his place in the county. And in joy, greatly blended with sorrow at our loss, we began a new life in our dear old home.

THE END.

STEVENS AND RICHARDSON, PRINTERS, 5, GREAT QUEEN STREET, W.C.

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